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Novel

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Politics and History

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"PLUS ÇA CHANGE . . ."

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CRIPPLED SPLENDOUR

TWO KINGDOMS

*The last four Plays are not on sale. Application
for copies should be made to the author personally.*

KINGS' MASQUE

SCENES FROM AN HISTORICAL
TRAGEDY

BY
EVAN JOHN



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE

In Grateful Admiration for Their Past: in
Sympathy and Bewilderment at Their
Present: in Unshaken Confidence for Their
Future. Monday the First of July, A.D. 1940.

“... Ce n'est pas à des Français qui ont tout
sacrifié que nous ferons l'injustice de recom-
mander le courage dans l'adversité.”

*Proclamation of
Royalist Exiles,
1792.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Those readers who want only a story are invited to turn straight over to page 1 and begin. Those who wish to know the proportions of Fact and Fiction in what they are reading, will find some enlightenment in the Postscript at end of book.

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PROLOGUE

(TO WHICH A RETURN MUST BE MADE)

Saturday, June 20th, 1810

"In my End is my Beginning."

—MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

THE OLD LADY IN BLACK paused to listen for a moment outside the half-closed door.

There were voices in the library—her brother's, pitched higher than usual and almost angry, the coachman's indistinguishable burr. "Foxes?" she heard her brother say. "What have foxes to do with us?"

She waited listening, as she could remember listening through the nursery door, half a century ago, while he arranged some childish game with her golden-haired sister. She had seen little enough of him since those early days. He had been still a boy when he started out upon his many travels. Nor would it have occurred to her meanwhile, in the full glory of her womanhood, to pause listening on any threshold or delay her triumphal entry. A reigning Beauty had no need to eavesdrop. But now her loveliness, so far as it survived at all, was of that autumnal kind which commands respect rather than submission. She was what Time had made her; she had spent long years among the Peeping Toms of the Court, where the adroit overhearing of conversations might win some long-coveted fortune, some long-solicited honour. Even now she would not have spied upon an enemy: one disdained or ignored enemies: but a brother, absent through long years and now returned to be the household friend of her widowhood, a brother encompassed by vague dangers that he was at pains to hide from her—surely he could have no complaint if she waited a moment, hoping to hear more clearly what threatened their quiet old age together?

She waited in vain. Silence had fallen in the library, except for the occasional crackle of paper. Her brother must be reading—presumably reading something that the coachman had brought up to show him. Perhaps, after all, it was only some arrangement for the State ceremony to which they would be driving that morning. She had better enter now and reveal her presence. One could not wait for ever outside a half-open door.

As she pushed it before her and knew it was too late to

change her mind, she heard her brother begin to speak again, and more sharply than ever. "Well, if you are afraid," he said, "I can find someone else to drive me!"

His back was towards her as she entered. He too was in black, but erect and graceful as ever. Beyond him stood the old servant, his tanned cheeks already flushed with indignant loyalty. No one that knew her brother well, certainly no one that had remained long in his service, could fail to feel love for him, and pain at his rarely-uttered rebukes. The unknown danger she feared must be a pressing one if it made him wantonly inflict such pain.

He was already conscious of her presence. She saw him pull open the upper drawer of his desk and thrust in a newspaper, before turning to her with his usual courteous smile.

"What is it?" she asked. "What is the matter?" She had little hope of an answer, knowing her brother. He had reached sixty, unmarried, and quaintly ignorant of women. He had never grasped that their willingness to be shielded from unpleasant things has narrow limits. Many women had laughed at him, and yet loved him for this very chivalry. Others had been irritated at it, loving him for his handsome face. None had so captured him as to teach him a worldlier wisdom. He hardly knew, save as a hackneyed joke, that all women are born inquisitive. "What is it?" she asked again, her eyes upon the drawer. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing, my dear," he answered, unruffled. "Just one of those cock-and-bull stories they're always printing nowadays."

"About us?" she asked, but he had already turned away.

"If your ladyship," began the coachman, "if your ladyship would be so good as to speak——"

A glance from his master cut short the man's appeal. He did not even wait for the threatened "You may go!" fearing, perhaps, the tone in which it might be spoken. He turned away, permitted himself a sigh at the obstinacy of great folk, and then made for the door.

He did not reach it unrebuked. "And please understand," said his master sharply, "that I do not wish this matter discussed below-stairs!"

The old lady smiled at her brother. It was strange that

anyone could live so wholly in the past, imagining that it was anything but waste of breath to give such orders to a servant.

As soon as they were alone, he fixed grave eyes on her. "I am glad you have put on mourning," he said.

"I've no cause to mourn," she answered cheerfully, "but the Court's in black, and I like to pretend I'm still at Court."

"I didn't mean that," he said, knitting his brows a little. "It's more because—— Well, we live rather out of the world these days, and it's as well to show that we are not out of sympathy with it, you and I. The people seem to be really affected by this loss, and they might show an ugly side towards any of us that appeared indifferent, let alone . . ."

"Let alone?" she queried. "How does one finish that sentence?"

"Well, shall we leave it unfinished?" he replied. "I only meant that there are stories going round. The death of any public character excites such foolish suspicions nowadays. And that idiot Rossi!" His voice took on a sudden energy, soon expended. He looked at her as if in apology. "But I'm glad you've put on mourning," he repeated.

"And I," she answered, with a mischievous half-curtsey, "am glad that it meets with your lordship's approval!"

She drew a brief smile from him, and then swept to the chair that had been her mother's and was now becoming *her* chair in the routine of old age. Since summer had come, it stood by the window, looking out on the terrace, and on the water beyond. As she settled her skirts, the warm morning sunshine flooded and shadowed her face. She saw that he was watching her, but as though he saw nothing.

"What are you looking at?" she asked, to rouse him from abstraction. "Are you disapproving of my umbrella? You're the most old-fashioned creature alive!"

"No," he said, declining her challenge. "I hadn't noticed you were carrying one." He walked to the new mahogany writing-desk that she had recently had brought into the room: she wrote far more letters than her mother had done. He stood for a moment with his back to her. "All the same," he said, "you wouldn't have been allowed to bring one of those things to Court when the King was alive."

They had lived through three reigns and into the fourth, but, whether they had liked him or not, there was only one King for them.

"Is it really the 20th?" he asked suddenly. "The 20th of June?" She saw that he had picked up her little silver-framed calendar, but only to put it down immediately.

"Yes," she said, half-laughing, "and it was to have been your wedding-day—only you are getting so superstitious in your old age! And you're breaking her poor young heart with all these delays."

He strode past her to the window, and she saw he was in no mood to be teased. He stood twisting the ring he wore on his finger, the ring he had always worn there since a twentieth of June nineteen years ago. Then his hands fell still and he gazed across the water at the sun glittering on the thousand roofs of the town. Through the open windows came a faint and distant murmur, as though many were gathered in its streets. He had memories that should have taught him to recognise, in the voice of a crowd, that strange note which boded ill to all who had been bred as he had been bred, thought as he thought. His mind was elsewhere, oblivious of the swiftly-changing Present. The Past was infinitely more significant to him than anything that happened now, or could ever happen again. He was not what men call religious, but there was a half-conscious Prayer in his mind these days, a home-sickness for something that had vanished for ever from the planet he still trod, but might await him in another and more gracious world.

For him, as for most men, it had once been embodied in a woman, and it was the loss of her that had first implanted the Prayer in his mind, many long years ago. There was no sign that it would soon be answered: he was hale and strong for his age, though without an aim for which his strength could be spent. Providence gave no inkling of a reason why he had lived so long, been so long an exile in a world that had ceased to find employment for his like.

His sister, watching him, had no thoughts of Providence, or even of the Past. Womanlike, and perhaps wiser than he, she knew no aim in life except to live. She never understood

why men must be for ever harassing themselves about solemn generalities, when there were enough little things to absorb all one's energies, excite all one's curiosity.

"What was it you two were discussing," she ventured again, "when I came into the room?"

He was still reluctant to answer her. "That fellow is getting old," he said. "We're all getting old. It's time he was pensioned off."

"I don't want to be pensioned off yet!" she said, laughing. "My poor old watch-dog used to say that one couldn't enjoy life until one was sixty. I am beginning to think he was right."

Her brother was too intent on his own thoughts to notice the sally, or the sudden melancholy that followed it. "It's queer he should be so anxious," he said, musingly. "After all, he's a coachman. He can hardly feel the same as I do."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," he said again, almost as if she had caught him out in some guilty secret. "I didn't mean anything."

"That's not true. You must have."

He hesitated a moment, and then decided to confess. "It's a curious thing," he said, "but when I—when we were little, I was always frightened of riding in Father's coach. I was fond enough of horses, even in those days. I suppose it was the feeling of being shut in. Yes, that must have been it, because it was always worst when we came driving in through the stable-arch and I knew that the gates would be closing behind us, shutting us in doubly, so to speak. Do you remember the gates of that stable-yard by the lake? I remember times when it was quite difficult not to scream and jump out before they could shut them on us. Odd, isn't it, the things a child imagines? I can't think why it should come back to me at my time of life. And even now, you know, when I'm in town, I dislike driving through narrow streets."

"I was thinking about our nursery days too," she said, "just before I came in. One changes so much, and forgets all about things—and then one seems to come back to them. As you ungallantly remarked just now, I am afraid we are both getting old."

He made no reply. He was still looking out of the window, across the terrace where they had once chased each other or fallen and grazed their knees upon the gravel. "Well," he said, "I suppose I must be going soon. I'd better go down and see that everything's ready. What a nuisance it all is."

"It's the penalty for being a great man!" she answered, smiling. "You have to go and look solemn for no particular reason—except that Papa had to go and look solemn on similar occasions—and Grandpapa before him. That's politics, I suppose."

"Politics?" he answered, with a hint of uneasiness. "This isn't politics. I've not mixed in *them* for ten years or more . . . at least, not to speak of." He broke off a moment, as though trying to remember something. "No, Custom," he went on, "mere Custom. And the world would never have fallen into its present state if people had realised the importance of Custom."

"I realise it!" she answered. "I'm accustomed to having my old brother to talk to in the mornings. And I resent having the custom broken for the sake of a silly procession."

He walked past her smiling and into the little writing-cabinet that led out of the Library. "Don't talk nonsense," he said through the open door. "You know that I generally go for a drive in the mornings, out into the country; and you know that you are generally too lazy to come with me."

He was back again before he had finished speaking, with an embroidered robe hanging over his forearm. He bent over her and kissed the top of her head.

It was still a pleasure to be kissed, even with a fiftieth birthday well behind her, a sixtieth in sight. She had lost an important lover so many years ago that she had no business to remember him now—and, for that matter, little desire. She had lost a husband, a faithful worshipper, and a dozen of unimportant fools that had buzzed round her in the meantime. She had regretted some of her losses, until time healed them. But she was contented now, feeling that Life is a good deal wiser than its own children and shapes them, however reluctant, towards their truest happiness. Perhaps there was nothing better, as old age approached, than to feel a brother's kiss on the top of one's head.

"I hope you won't be late for dinner," she said, as if he were indeed her husband.

"I'll try not to be," he answered, "but you know what these occasions are. If they've let the streets get too crowded . . ."

The unfinished words carried him out of the room. As he opened the door, there came in, from the passage window, a faint jingle of coach-harness in the street, a moment's pawing of waiting horse-hoofs. Then he closed it behind him, and there was silence in the room. The old lady was alone.

She sat still awhile, if only to preserve her self-respect. But it was not long before she rose and walked to her brother's desk. There was mischief on her face as she opened his upper drawer—a momentary return of that boyishness that had been part of her youthful charm. She took out a crumpled newspaper, and pulled it flat as she sauntered back to her chair. There was no difficulty in finding the right column to read: it was surmounted, in large and blotchy type, by the heading:

THE FABLE OF THE FOXES.

She could not understand what she read, though it affected her with a vague discomfort that amounted almost to a nausea. In particular, she could not believe that anyone, however vile or ignorant, could refer to herself as the Old Vixen. She could make neither head nor tail of the whole business. In a minute or two she had let the paper slide from her lap and was enjoying the sunshine and her own quiet thoughts.

She would only have laughed if anyone had tried to tell her what unquiet things were in store for her, and with what terrifying suddenness they must come. She could not have believed how soon she would be digging, actually digging, on the terrace outside, burying the innocent things that must be hidden from the inrush of Violence and Slander. She could have refused to recognise the fantastic picture of herself as she was to be that night—changing clothes with a milk-woman from the streets and escaping in disguise from the thousands that would be thirsting for her delicate blood, glad to spend hours in an open boat on stormy, rain-lashed seas.

Her brother would soon be driving through the first empty

streets towards the crowded centre of the city. Six magnificent white horses before him in red morocco harness; six lacqueys in beribboned white livery, to run beside the gilded coach that had been his father's and his father's father's. He, at least, had been warned and had some sense of approaching danger. But he could hardly know how soon his Prayer would be taking shape against him. He could hardly know with what swiftness the coach would be bearing him Home, nor through what gruesome gates.

BOOK ONE

THE DANCE OF LOVE

*

CHAPTER ONE

NEW WORLD (1781)

*"Pour moi, j'aime mieux
écouter et me taire."*

Axel von Ferson:
Letter to his
father from America

CONTENTS OF CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRDS

MELTING-POT

THE HEIR

STRATEGIC

ROADSIDE REVERIE

BOMBARDMENT

A VAST CLOUD OF BIRDS was whirring and chattering, soaring and settling again, upon one of the long promontories that Virginia thrusts out eastward, into the Atlantic Ocean.

It was Autumn, and Autumn has a way of making birds restless, and almost hysterically talkative. This particular season had provided them—in so far as they can have any interest in the doings of Man—with some unusual topics for chatter. For years past, the earth-bound creatures that nest in houses had begun to wear clothes of striking and uniform patterns, to parade round in blue and scarlet, like so many parakeets, and make an intolerable deal of noise and smoke in their efforts to kill each other. But now it looked as if there were to be some crisis to their bloody antics. The blue-coated Americans had been joined by men in white—trim legions from overseas with gay songs to sing and golden lilies on their banners. The birds of all Europe had long been accustomed to such a spectacle as a French army presented: Europe was in permanent masquerade these days, crowning its military and sartorial follies with rows of powdered wigs which looked like jiggling snowballs as one winged one's way above them; and whether the dance were a sprightly Gavotte or a Sarabande of death, there would be Frenchmen setting the step. Here, in more soberly-clad America, the white-coats were a rarer and more conspicuous sight; they had not been seen these twenty years, not since their scarlet adversaries had clambered up the Heights of Abraham (as to some eagle's eyrie) and driven them beaten from Quebec.

They had come back now, for reasons no bird could guess. For weeks past they had been swarming in their thousands down the roads from New England to Virginia, bunching at every bridge over the Anna and the Rappahannock. But they (and their ragged blue allies) left plenty of good corn in the waggon-ruts; and their muskets, forged for a deadlier purpose, were seldom pointed aloft. There had been no reason why

flocks of birds should not follow the line of march.

It was early morning when the thousand-winged cloud swept over the peninsula where Yorktown stands; but the coloured coats were already astir, forming and re-forming their scattered patterns on the slopes. From the great circle of tents that menaced the town, Blue and White were swarming out to swing cannon against Scarlet in its already battered trenches. Far down the estuary, the glint of sails suggested that the great ships would soon swim in to join their voices to the impending chorus of thunder. But it was early yet: there might be an hour or two's respite before the signal was given. The birds could settle down among the thickets and gullies, twittering to each other of Man's inscrutable ways.

Man himself could hardly appreciate what great issues were to be decided round beleaguered Yorktown, nor how the outcome would help to alter Earth's face for birds as well as for himself—multiplying huge cities over the ruin of cornland and forest, stringing wires or rails across solitudes now unmapped. For this Revolution that the Frenchmen were helping to birth would itself beget a hundred others. Beneath the powdered wigs, the shakos and three-cornered hats, the Brain of Man was fermenting with half-formed plans, shapeless aspirations, unborn Sciences. Among the gaily-uniformed creatures that strolled in and out of the tents, there were many who would soon be prophets and organisers of a new and incredible world. Thirty years hence, all would be astonished and most appalled, at the outcome to which that morning's work had contributed. Some would regret that they had had a hand in it, cursing their own ignorance or indifference or enthusiasm. It would be too late then. It was too late now, or would be, so soon as the first gunner had clapped his match to the touch-hole, the first cannon-ball had winged its way towards Yorktown trenches.

II

IT WAS STILL CHILLY inside the big marquee, and if the young Count of St. Simon was stamping up and down, it was partly to keep his feet warm. But the movement was also expressive of his emotions, of the ungovernable temperament that made him something of a misfit in the French army and in the leisurely, aristocratic world into which he had been born. "When will the Marquis come back?" he was asking, not for the first time. "How long am I to be kept waiting here?"

"The Marquis will certainly be here," answered one of the three *aides-de-camp*, "before the batteries open fire."

"That will be very good of him! And my 'own guns—how do I give them orders to open when I am kept here?" St. Simon's eyes smouldered, his gaunt young frame seemed alive with grievances.

The *aide-de-camp* shrugged sarcastic shoulders. "You had better go and interrupt him," he answered. "He is only discussing the plan of siege with General Washington: he will no doubt be delighted to listen to you instead."

St. Simon snorted, walked another turn or two, and came to a halt beside a middle-aged Virginian gentleman who stood looking out through the tent-door. "Is it Mr. Governor Neilson?" he asked. "Are you, too, waiting for the Marquis?"

"It is. And I am," answered the American good-humouredly, in his somewhat unsteady French. "I am hoping to speak to your M. Le Marquis before the bombardment recommences."

"To ask him if he will spare your house?" asked St. Simon, with a slight sneer.

"To ask him," answered Mr. Neilson, "if his gunners will give it their particular attention. I have reason to believe that these bloodsuckers have made it the headquarters for one of their generals—perhaps for Lord Cornwallis himself." He stared out into the morning sunlight, towards his abandoned home. "It would be only likely," he added, with

pardonable vanity, "I reckon it's the best built house in Town."

St. Simon had already turned, and was marching back to the far end of the long trestle-table. Here sat an army clerk, his face grey with lack of sleep, copying out the despatches that two young *aides-de-camp* passed to him, never leaving him time to finish one before pushing another across. There was a bowl of coffee between them, and both were dipping crusts into it as they shuffled their papers to and fro. A third, a slightly older man, after a busy night among the batteries, was snatching an hour's sleep on a camp-bed behind them.

"Have you wine, Lameth?" asked St. Simon, looking with distaste at the brown and steaming bowl.

The *aide-de-camp* grimaced at his companion, dived under the table and emerged with a bottle and glass. St. Simon was a junior officer, and something of a nuisance, but, as he had an uncle who was Major-General in the expeditionary army, it was generally politic to humour him.

St. Simon drank standing. Chairs, one guessed, saw no hard service in the quarters he occupied. His restless eyes and long nose gave him the air of a young Don Quixote, of a fanatic that had not yet found his idol—though it was hardly likely to be a romantic or chivalrous idol.

Mr. Governor Neilson felt a slight discomfort as he watched him empty the glass and jerk the bottle up to refill it. Mr. Neilson had been brought up with aspirations of a more sober kind—and with a greater respect for good wine. For that matter, he did not feel quite at home with any of these young Frenchmen, certainly not with the satirical-tongued M. De Lameth, nor even with the more kindly-faced of the two *aides-de-camp*, a handsome young stranger, who sat sipping coffee and saying nothing at all.

"If I am in your way here," he said, with dignity, "perhaps one of you gentlemen would give my message to the Marquis."

He turned to a bullet-headed young officer who sat at the near end of the table, twisting a pair of compasses over a large map and muttering the place names to himself in a tone of annoyance. When one has had the privilege to be born at Versailles, almost under the shadow of King Louis' palace,

it does not seem quite *comme il faut* to call a river 'Chinco-teague' or 'Pamunkey'. The young officer, with his somewhat limited sense of the properties, was thinking that these Americans would have to do something about the names, if they wanted to become a nation, and a civilised one. But at the moment he was too busy to notice that an American was addressing him.

"You'll not get an answer from Berthier," called out Lameth, "while he has a map he can play with!"

"So it appears. So it appears!" said Mr. Neilson with unruffled good humour. "He makes me feel the useless civilian that I am. It is time I knew more of the mysteries of your profession."

"Mysteries?" snapped St. Simon; it was immediately obvious that the word was a red rag to him. "There are no mysteries about it! Like everything else, it's a matter of calculation and experiment. Soldiers aren't priests—making mysteries out of something that is only Common Sense. Or only Nonsense, like half the things a priest will try and tell you!"

Mr. Neilson had met Papists in his own country, but never Papists that talked of their religion as these French officers did; he would have been shocked to learn that St. Simon, at fifteen, had refused to go to his First Communion.

"I did not expect to hear such opinions," he said, "from a European." He stepped aside as a sleepy-eyed messenger pushed into the tent, placed a bundle of papers before Lameth, and was gone again into the sunlight. "I was thinking," he continued, "that you would tell us that Things in General are not so simple as we are apt to imagine them in a new country such as ours."

"There are plenty of Europeans," said St. Simon, "who make it their business to talk as if perfectly simple things were complicated and mysterious. And we have to pay them for it—God knows why! Priests paid to make a mystery of Christ's teaching, courtiers drawing pensions for making a mystery out of kingship—and the only mystery is why we let 'em do it! I obey King Louis because I hold his commission, and because he happens to be officer-in-charge of my

country—not because some old hypocrite in an alb soused him with oil in Rheims Cathedral!”

“And who would think,” said Lameth quietly, looking up at the tent-roof, “that the St. Simons were descended from Charlemagne?”

“And why not? Tell me that!” stormed St. Simon; it was evident that ridicule could always find the chink in his armour. “Why should we not be descended from Charlemagne? He was an innovator, a revolutionary: he reorganised Europe! And if he were alive now, he’d spit in the face of those who are content to keep to his reorganisation—after it’s had twelve centuries to decay in! Feudalism and Superstition and Tyranny—God, it makes me sick to think what we put up with!”

“We’re not putting up with Tyranny,” said Mr. Neilson with a smile. “We’re accepting your help to drive our tyrant’s troops into the sea.”

“Yes, and why?” asked St. Simon aggressively. “So that you can go on owning slaves without paying any taxes. So that your friends in New England can go on starving their work-people and wasting what Nature intended for all men on their silly pride and luxury. I came to America to discover a New World, a little less cumbered with crime and folly than the old one. I’ve not discovered it. By all I’ve seen, I’ll be cursed if things are any better over here than they are in Europe.”

“Oh, God!” said a sleepy voice from the camp-bed. “First of all it’s those damned birds, and now it’s St. Simon. Is one never to get any sleep?”

“It’ll be the guns in half an hour,” said Lameth drily.

“Who’s wanting sleep?” asked St. Simon with a glance of contempt at the yawning *aide-de-camp*. “I’ve been up two nights now, and I’m quite game for a third.”

“Talking politics all the time?” said the voice from the bed.

“I wish I had been! There’s some sense in talking things out, and I’m cursed if I can see the sense in fighting! One day, we’ll educate people into doing without War, and I shall be able to help the World on, instead of spending my time getting gun-wheels out of the mud.”

"You'd leave some of us with nothing to do," objected Lameth. "Look at Berthier there. Where would he be without an army to make maps and regulations for?"

"Of course, if it's all a joke to you!" St. Simon slammed his glass down with such violence that the stem of it snapped, and the bowl bounced down to the yellowing grass below. "We'll need men to organise Peace," he said, "even more than we need them to organise War. That's all we *do* need, organisation. Every man working for the good of society, instead of private property and luxury and waste, waste, waste! Men like Berthier there will be just what we——"

He broke off short. Berthier had risen from the table, as a young Frenchman in American uniform stepped into the tent to hand him a paper.

"For the Marquis De Rochambeau," said the newcomer. "With General Washington's compliments."

"But, M. De La Fayette," began Berthier, "the Marquis is with General Washington now. A conference. They——"

"I know, I know," interrupted La Fayette. "I am just going to them. This is just for entrance in your records. It was forgotten last night."

He turned to peer down the big marquee. He was a raw-boned, clumsily-built lad, for all his ancient lineage and vast wealth: he had been bred an orphan, in a lonely old castle among the hills of Auvergne; he had come out to America as a volunteer long before the French government decided to send its army, but years of blundering war had not yet dimmed his boyish fire.

He handed over his document and looked round the tent—at the lean St. Simon and the sleek Neilson, at the long table where the *aides-de-camp* breakfasted, their clerk scribbled, and Berthier grumbled over his maps. He could hardly see the camp-bed, and was not interested in the shadowy lengths beyond. The sun was beginning to strike more warmly through the canvas roof above him, and M. De La Fayette was of a nature that responded to the sun.

"Any news, Marquis?" asked Governor Neilson, dwelling an instant on the unfamiliar title.

"No, sir. Except that we have them this time!"

"I'm glad to have your assurance of that."

"I'm glad to give it, Governor. And with Cornwallis captured, the war will be as good as finished. You can make yourselves a Constitution, and your Liberty will be secure."

"He is not captured yet," observed Lameth. "I wish we could all have M. De La Fayette's faith in Liberty."

"You would have, if you'd seen it at work!" La Fayette's eyes flashed with sudden fire. "Come and learn a little faith from my Americans. We're at half-strength, we haven't two pairs of sound boots to the regiment, and we've not seen a square meal for a month. But my men know that the end's in sight, and they'll fight ten times better to-day than King George's overfed swine. That's what Liberty means, and the whole world will have to know it soon."

"Oh, God!" said the voice from the camp-bed, "there's two of them at it now!"

"Like most of the world," said St. Simon, acidly, "our friend prefers Sleep to Liberty."

"I prefer it to being educated, at any rate. You two fellows——" The protest was interrupted by an unquarable yawn. The handsome young *aide-de-camp* who sat so silent, made sure of the interruption by putting a steaming crust of bread into the gaping mouth.

"That sort of fellow doesn't know what education means," said St. Simon, ignoring raillery.

"Who does—in France?" asked La Fayette. "When I was a boy, I was sent to a priest who tried to teach me how to make elegant rhymes; and then I was sent to Versailles so that the Queen could laugh at me when I made a false step in her Minuet." He was unconsciously looking towards the silent *aide-de-camp* as he spoke; he was surprised to see the young man's grey eyes flash suddenly back at him. "All I learnt at Versailles," he went on undisturbed, "was how to flatter fashionable ladies, and compound with the vices of fashionable gentlemen. My education began when I reached America, and found Men and Women!"

He had shifted his gaze to Mr. Neilson, and Mr. Neilson, being a Virginian, did not seem to relish the implication that

there were no gentlemen in America. "I hope your view of Liberty," he began, "does not preclude——"

His voice died away. St. Simon, opening his mouth to contradict somebody or denounce something, was struck equally dumb. La Fayette had taken a sudden step away from them and was gazing into the dark recesses of the marquee behind the *aides-de-camp*.

"What the devil have you got there?" he asked.

They turned to follow the direction of his gaze. Mr. Neilson, peering past them, in the increasing daylight, saw a heap of blankets and saddle-cloths huddled round the furthest tent-pole. On it, barely distinguishable in colour, sat a shrouded figure, with the stillness of some primeval rock. Only the long black hair and brick-red skin proclaimed him an American—but one of that race that had known the prairies before Columbus was born.

"God bless my soul!" said Mr. Neilson, and then, after a pause: "A prisoner, I presume?"

"No," said Lameth, turning back to his work. "A would-be ally. From one of the tribes that are not fighting for the British, and want to fight for us. He came this morning to speak of the Marquis De Rochambeau."

"If the Marquis intends to use these cut-throats as allies——" began Mr. Neilson, and stopped abruptly. He could not see the Indian's eyes, nor detect the smallest movement on the blankets; but he suddenly felt unaccountably embarrassed. There was a moment of silence, only broken by young Berthier muttering "Chickahominy" to himself with a mounting disgust.

"We're not Englishmen," said La Fayette, in a lordly tone. "We do not hire savages to scalp women and children."

"They'd be hired soon enough if it were worth while!" answered St. Simon. "Governments will do anything; that's part of their mystery! If you asked me to choose between Kings and Cannibals, I'd be happier with the Cannibals."

The Indian stirred suddenly on the blankets, re-enforcing silence. "If the gentlemen speak of me," he said, in slow, guttural French, "I would tell the gentlemen that I understand their language." He paused, as if to emphasise the implied

rebuke. "How else," he asked, "how else would my people send me to speak with your Marquis?"

"I take it," suggested Lameth, concealing his embarrassment, "that he fought on our side in the old days, before the English jockeyed us out of Quebec."

"Maybe," said La Fayette, "and now his people want an excuse for scalping some of their neighbours—and want to borrow muskets from us, to help 'em do it."

He turned back towards the Indian. "We've none to give you, Mr. Bull-in-the-Mist!" he called out. "We haven't enough for our own men." He drew out a watch, and made for the tent-door. "I must be getting back to the General," he said.

As he passed out, Berthier rose to click his heels and sit down again. The others seemed queerly still, as if under some kind of spell. The silent young *aide-de-camp* broke it by taking the pen from the clerk. "Go to the cook-house and get some breakfast," he said. "I'll finish these."

The tired man blinked, more in surprise than gratitude, and made a puzzled departure. Mr. Neilson began to fidget, his eyes still on the Red Indian. "I trust," he said, "that your Marquis will consult me or some other Virginian before having any dealings with these creatures."

The Indian rose, with a sudden litheness that was almost alarming. One saw that he was an oldish man, and guessed that he was resentful. He stood silent for a moment as though trying to plumb the secret of the White Man's discourtesy. When he spoke at last, it was with dark eyes fixed upon the floor.

"I came only to ask," he said, "and to understand. In the old time, our Father the French King fought with the King of England. Good. That we could understand. Now the servants of the English King make a mutiny against him, and our Father, himself a King, sends armies to assist their mutiny. How shall we understand that?" He looked round the circle of white-skinned faces, as if half expecting an answer. "My people bade me come here that I may ask what it means, and that I may ask what our Father would have us do."

"Do?" snapped Mr. Neilson impatiently. "You should stay in your wigwams and do nothing! We've no place here for cattle-thieves."

The Indian's shoulders heaved and he took a deep breath. Then he gathered his striped mantle round him and walked past the Frenchmen, past Mr. Neilson, to the tent-door. "I will speak with the Marquis," he said. "I will come back and speak with the Marquis. But if he has come to help such men as this man . . . No. Your ways are not our ways. We cannot understand."

He passed out of sight, leaving awkwardness behind him. Mr. Neilson only increased it by mumbling something about not letting the creature lay his hands on any brandy—"unless you want him howling himself sick round the camp."

"I shall go and speak to him," said St. Simon suddenly, "until the Marquis returns. One can always learn something from people that have not yet been corrupted with our civilisation." He stared at Mr. Neilson, as if defying him to contradict, and strode rapidly out, his long nose shining in the sunlight.

Mr. Neilson was left grumbling to himself. He was annoyed to see that the silent young *aide-de-camp* was looking over his papers with an unmistakable smile on his face. "M. De Lameth," said the Governor testily, "you have not yet introduced me to your colleague."

"Your pardon!" Lameth waved an ironic hand. "Mr. Governor Neilson—the Count Axel von Fersen. *Aide-de-camp* to M. le Marquis De Rochambeau. He has come all the way from Sweden to help us expel your tyrant for you. Now may I get on with my breakfast?"

The young Swede half-rose, half-bowed to Mr. Neilson. If he smiled, it was partly in politeness, partly at the word 'tyrant'. His travels—wide for one of his age—had once taken him to London, and even into King George's audience-chamber. He remembered a dark room with greasy curtains, furnished in the worst of taste, where a red-necked gentleman of middle-aged corpulence fussed irritably at his guests and occasionally treated them to a flash of rustic shrewdness. There had been nothing noticeably tyrannical in that tedious experience.

"All peoples, nations and languages," Mr. Neilson was declaiming, "united in the common cause. We shall know how

to be grateful to our foreign friends as soon as the victory is won."

"I shall have earned no gratitude," said the Swede politely. "I only came here to learn and to observe. Like our red-skinned friend, I do not understand your politics."

Mr. Neilson, his eloquence expended, was beginning to wonder if he had heard the introduction aright. The more he looked at the young stranger's face, with its delicately-arched eyebrows and sensitive, pouting mouth, the less could he connect it with anything he had ever imagined about Sweden. Mr. Neilson knew a great deal about tobacco-planting and could quote Virgil or the Bible with equal facility, but his notions of Sweden wavered between vague pictures of Esquimaux, and equally vague facts about Vikings with battle-axes. It would have been difficult to convince him that young Fersen was a typical Swedish aristocrat, and the product of a society as sophisticated and pleasure-loving as any in Europe. But Mr. Neilson was a Virginian and boasted that he knew a gentleman when he saw one. Nor did it take him long to decide, watching the grave grey eyes and smiling lips, that Count Fersen was a devilish attractive young fellow.

"Well, I think you'll find plenty to observe," he said complacently, "especially now that you've marched south to Virginia. New England, of course——!" He waved a hand in apology for New England's social inadequacies. "But you will have been able to draw your own conclusions."

Fersen said nothing. He was, in truth, no mean observer; a century hence, men would be finding the letters he wrote home from America to his father; and they would find in them the observation that if America won freedom from King George in this war, Virginia would one day start another to win freedom from New England.

"I only hope you will stay here," continued Mr. Neilson. "After we get the English out of our country, and can put things in proper order. The fall of Yorktown will give us some opportunity to——"

"Not fallen yet," interrupted Berthier, looking up from his maps. "Enthusiasts like M. De La Fayette . . . Mustn't

calculate on capturing the town yet. Report come in this morning of ships sighted out to sea."

"But surely," said the disconcerted American, "surely that will be your own fleet—M. De Grasse coming up to join in the bombardment?"

"Or the English," said Lameth drily, "coming up to blow M. De Grasse to the devil and rescue Milord Cornwallis. . . . Have you finished the Third Brigade orders, Fersen?"

"I think you are wrong," said Mr. Neilson, with the dignity of complete ignorance. "In fact, I am sure of it. The next day or two will probably see the whole war decided. And you young gentlemen can begin thinking of getting home to your sweethearts in France . . . or in Sweden!"

He smiled patronisingly, if a trifle nervously, at the bent heads round the *aides-de-camp* table.

"France, France for both of us," said Lameth without looking up. "Fersen made his conquest before we left Versailles."

Mr. Neilson saw the young Swede give Lameth a look of half-incredulous hostility and then try to bury himself in his papers again. "So Count Fersen," he said without thinking, "has the good taste to look for a wife, as well as companions-in-arms, among the subjects of King Louis?"

Fersen scribbled another word or two, rose abruptly and walked towards the tent-door. He seemed to stand irresolute, fingering a paper in his hand and fighting some obscure irritation. "I had better take this to the Marquis at once," he said. "Or perhaps . . ." his voice trailed away. Then he squared his shapely shoulders and stepped out into the morning sun.

"Your friend seems touchy," remarked Mr. Neilson, "or do I owe him an apology for some indiscretion?"

"No," answered Lameth, "it was I that committed the indiscretion. The joke was all over the army when we first came out—but we always kept it from Fersen himself. Foreigners take these things so seriously."

"Some lady already married?" ventured Mr. Neilson, with an almost comical gravity.

"Oh yes, married," answered Lameth. "That's considered

better taste nowadays. We leave *mes demoiselles* to our provincials. But don't go and ask him whom she is married to!"

"Someone very high up?" whispered Mr. Neilson almost in awe; he felt himself on the track of appetising secrets. His curiosity was thwarted by the sleepy voice from the camp-bed.

"Are you talking about women?" asked the third *aide-de-camp*, in a new tone of interest.

"They are," said Berthier irritably, "and I wish they'd stop it. Let me get on. Fersen's a good soldier; drew up an excellent report on the forage yesterday. His private affairs are entirely his own concern."

"M. Berthier," announced Lameth with a grimace, "has no private affairs. He cherishes a guilty passion for maps, and conducts dubious intrigues with commissariat-lists. In the matter of women, his conduct-sheet is an irritating blank, countersigned by the Superintendent of Young Officers' Morals on Active Service . . . Fersen's left more coffee than I want: would you care for some, Mr. Neilson?"

Mr. Neilson hardly heard. He was looking out of the door, watching the tall, slim figure that still seemed to be lingering, fifty yards down the dusty track.

The camp-bed creaked as the third *aide-de-camp* swung his legs down and sat up on its edge. "Talking of women," he said, "I must tell you fellows about something that happened when we were coming through Philadelphia. There was a girl there who . . ."

III

QUEEN MARIE-ANTOINETTE HAD AWAKENED in the great canopied bed in Versailles Palace, and she lay wondering how she came to be alone.

She imagined she must be alone; the silence was complete. She was exhausted, and still a little dizzy with the pain; she did not want to call out. When she opened her eyes to see if anyone else was by, the light from the great tall windows made them smart so, that she was quick to close them again. The silence was almost unnatural, after the bustle and crisis of the past few hours. For the second time in her life, the first for a year, she was glad of silence and solitude. She was happy, happy, happy.

They had not left her long alone, a year ago. At her first lying-in, the room had been filled with faces—grim watchers from distant provinces whose office and birthright it was to look on at their Queen's agony, and return to assure Burgundy or Languedoc that there had been no trickery at the birth of their future King. Behind them, on window-sills and mantel-piece, climbed some of the riff-raff of Paris: Reason of State decreed that no would-be spectator must be excluded from the entertainment of a Queen in torment, a Prince entering the world.

She had not cared. These things had been so since the first Capet was born, and she could defy the ranks of glassy eyes as proudly as the Isabellas and Radegundas of old time. She was Queen of France. Only her poor husband (scarcely daring to believe, after their childless years, that he was about to become a father), only King Louis had felt the agony of cruel and out-moded Custom. She remembered how he had stumbled about among the crowded stools, peering short-sightedly towards her with pathetic, encouraging smiles. Then he could bear inaction no more, and, defying the ruling fad of the Doctors, had begun to break open the sealed-up windows and let fresh air into the stifling bedroom.

He had been so distressed for her, so remorseful of his own powerlessness to shield her, that he could not feel half her disappointment when the cause of all the pother had proved to be a daughter instead of the needed heir.

He had been a little firmer this time, insisting on a decent privacy, and again she had smiled at his insistence and held her pride untouched. For all that, she had fainted away as soon as she was delivered, and had not yet seen her babe. What was hurried away into the next room might be merely another princess—in a Court where princesses would mean only more anxiety and more expense. But she was sure, in her own heart, that this time she had not failed France. She had borne Louis a son and heir.

Life would be very different for her, as mother to a Dauphin. She would be able at last to silence the venomous tongues which had gloated over her seven years' childlessness, her husband's long and humiliating impotence. She would be Queen indeed now, and teach them silence and respect.

She would never need again to give them excuses for their slander. She would not need to wait impatiently at evening, till King Louis, stupid with much food and hunting, had yawned himself towards his early bed and left her free to slip away to the gaming-tables or to a midnight ball in Paris. It had once seemed a good jest to let some ingenious courtier twist the clock-hands forward in order to send her husband bedwards an hour earlier than he knew. It had once seemed a deliciously exciting adventure to stay out until dawn was pink over Paris and poor people were beginning to clatter to work in the fresh morning air. Mother to an heir, she would need neither jests nor adventures. She had been blamed for extravagance, by those that could not understand a Queen's need for jewels and dresses and cards. They would not dare to blame her now if she spent her money on a new and healthier home for her children, away from this hateful, custom-ridden Versailles. There she could be happy as God and Nature had meant her to be happy, changing her way of life to such sober tunes as would give Slander no instant of excuse. She would not need the crowds of flattering friends, the men that had pretended to be her admiring captives. The young soldiers

that had begged regiments from her, and were now fighting in America, would come home to find a new Queen in France. The news was good from America: Victory and Peace seemed near. But before the soldiers returned she would have made a peace at home in place of fevered pleasure-hunting, won a victory over her own extravagances and frivolities and pardonable follies. A New World was opening before her, free from the siege of calumny, a new hope of becoming what her enemies had scoffed at as impossible.

"No. Oh no! It's too late for that."

She could not tell who was whispering behind her. She could not be sure that she was not still in delirium. She opened her eyes, found the light bearable, and waved an unsteady hand. "Who is there?" she asked.

There was an immediate rustle of silk skirts, a scraping of elegant chair-legs on the polished floor. The Princess De Lamballe was the first of her ladies to arrive, pathetically eager. Lamballe knew herself to be out of favour, knew, perhaps, that the Queen, who had once called her pretty face angelic, was now beginning to find it sheepish.

"If we had known that Your Majesty was awake——"

The Queen smiled pardon. She must be friends with Lamballe again—if not with the old schoolgirl passion; Mme De Polignac, who had recently supplanted her, was certainly better company, cleverer, more amusing. But dumb loyalty, a soft, stupid heart that was yet as true as steel—these things were in the long run preferable to all the wit and vivacity in the world.

"We thought Your Majesty was asleep," repeated the Princess.

"I heard someone say—did one of you whisper something about 'Too late'?"

"No. . . . Yes. Madame De Campan." The Princess pointed to a homelier lady at the foot of the bed. "I asked about some medicine, and she said——"

"I said," Madame Campan continued for her, "that the doctors told us to administer it if Your Majesty woke in the first few minutes. But it will be too late now: Your Majesty has been asleep for an hour."

"Was that all?" Marie-Antoinette closed peaceful eyes, returning to her dreams of the approaching future. "Are they—is His Majesty in the next room?"

"Yes. Shall I let him know that Your Majesty is awake? He will want to tell you the news himself." The Princess hesitated, dithering between the bed and the door. The doctors had said that the patient must not be excited, must not be told any news, even good news, that might affect her too strongly. "I can wait," said the Queen. "I am really quite a reasonable person, you know." She smiled at them, secure and confident. "Who else is there," she asked. "I mean, apart from the doctors?"

"His Majesty's aunts. Both His Majesty's brothers. My lord Archbishop. . . ."

Marie-Antoinette closed happy eyes. His Majesty's brothers would not be enjoying themselves in the next room. She had never fathomed the Duc De Provence, the self-satisfied, literary Provence whose private thoughts were beyond everyone's guessing. She knew enough and too much about the foppish shallow-pated D'Artois, whom she had allowed to share her dissipations and amuse her with his graceless tricks. The pair of them had almost patronised her through her long years of childlessness, hugging the delusion that she would never bear an heir to bar their path to their brother's throne. They had still pretended to be friendly, in their different ways, after her daughter's birth. If they seemed friends in future, to a Dauphin's mother, she might need to beware of their friendship. There would be no loss there: D'Artois, at any rate, had never been anything but a temporary accomplice in extravagance and idle jests, gambling and midnight frolics. She would never need an accomplice for such things again.

She opened her eyes and smiled at Madame De Lamballe.

She had been slandered for favouring foreigners, for preferring Austrians, Englishmen, Swedes even, to the nobility of France. She must be more careful in the future; she would continue privately to prefer the attentions of a disinterested foreigner to the flatteries of a Frenchman who was hoping for a pension or a job from the Queen of France. But in future she

would encourage attentions from neither, and shut her ears to the most winning flattery. Only the thought of her Swedish friends called up a certain face, a certain pair of grave grey eyes that were still undeniably disturbing. They even clouded her new-found tranquillity, her sincere resolutions for the future. He could have no part in the new world she was determined to make around her: it might be better if they never met again except in the World where there were neither husbands nor the giving of Queens to husbands they had not chosen. When the young men came back from America, she must see to it that one of them——

Her thoughts were scattered by a clumsy knocking at the door. There was only one man who would knock so, and now she could hear her husband coughing apologetically before he entered. For a moment her confidence deserted her, her fears returned: for a moment she felt sure that it was only another daughter she had given him. "What is it?" she said, in a voice husky with alarm.

He was still outside and as slow as ever. "It is M. Le Dauphin," he said at last. "M. Le Dauphin is asking for an audience with Her Majesty."

He elbowed the door aside, and entered, radiant with pride and happiness. In his arms was a little white bundle, clutched with heavy-handed tenderness. He came shuffling towards her, and laid her son beside her on the bed. His short-sighted eyes sought her proud ones. For a moment, it was good and very good to be married to King Louis, to Louis the Apologetic, Louis the Good-natured, Louis the Sound of Heart.

A crowd was entering behind him, a whole world flooding back into the room that had been so silent and apart. The doctors buzzed questions at her attendants or pretended to hush the newcomers. M. D'Artois and M. De Provence needed little hushing; they stood screwing smiles into their glum faces and hankering after vanished hope. The King's aunts were a little more cordial than usual, but it still roused her to resentment that anyone could be so elderly and maiden and disapproving. She could not help feeling more pleasure in the compliments of the young men, the admiration of the women who were more nearly her rivals in youth and beauty. Life was

not the simple affair she had been imagining it a few minutes ago. It was the strangest of masquerades, where each man or woman must play so complex a part that it was useless to lie in bed and think it out beforehand. Even the little bundle that whimpered beside her among lace and linen—the pledge, as she had thought it, of a new simplicity—would soon be adding to the delightful complications. A Queen need not run away from Life because she had become mother to a son. A Queen must set an example, not only in duty, but in pleasures and elegancies too. There were a thousand matters to be thought of, a thousand things to be bought, now that she was returning to life unencumbered, and, mother to a Dauphin, with a new source of power. She would certainly need new dresses, perhaps new jewellery. If she abandoned her dancing and her cards with unexplained abruptness, Slander would be swift to supply some discreditable explanation. She must be unashamedly herself. She must play on at her own game, not with the old fever of unacknowledged fear, but with the zest of true and inward happiness. “Bring me a mirror!” she cried to the radiant Lamballe, “I want to see what I look like!”

It was good to be holding her husband's hand, good to feel her son warm against her side: she was very much a woman, and there was no comfort like the comforting thought, ‘We three’. But it was good, too, to look in the mirror, at her bright eyes unclouded, her proud mouth red, her rounded face set gracefully on the white neck, her crown of auburn hair.

She looked past the edge of the mirror, noting the dresses of the women, the men's faces intent on her own. Her ears were greedy, after long silence, for the sound of their cheerful voices and rustling clothes. Her happiness welled up inside her, seemed to reach out and embrace them all.

She hardly noticed the doctor taking a medicine bottle from Madame Campan and perusing its Latin label with affected self-importance. She hardly heard the dry tones in which he spoke. “Yes, you were right, Madame,” he was saying. “Much too late.”

IV

THE GUNS HAD NOT YET SPOKEN AGAINST Yorktown: the birds still picked and chattered among the thickets of the peninsula.

General Washington stood on the slopes above the Beaverdam, with his spy-glass fixed upon the British trenches. Young La Fayette was at his elbow, and behind them stood Knox of Massachusetts, General of Artillery. The conference with the French Marquis was over: there was nothing more that could be done by talking: in a few minutes the guns would open fire.

It was the last throw in what was now becoming, for both players, an almost desperate gamble. The British could hardly carry on the war, against so many grumblers at home, if their best army were trapped in Yorktown, and pounded into destruction or surrender. Washington had marched all the Frenchmen and half his Americans southwards in hope of a decisive pounding. But if Cornwallis held out till his fleet came to rescue and trans-ship him northward—far faster than Washington's men could trudge their way back—then New England, with its depleted armies and denuded forts, would feel the whole weight of England's anger. And Washington had grumblers enough behind him to use such a disaster as excuse for insisting that the Cause of Liberty was hopeless, that it must be abandoned before it wasted more blood and more money.

General Washington had no illusions about Liberty. For seven years he had fought the English in the field, and found them less terrible adversaries than the sloth and grudging avarice of his so-called supporters. He had seen Liberty shield intrigue and sickening jealousies and shameless treason, and he had come to two curious conclusions. He was quite sure that no one but himself could win Liberty for the American people: and he was quite sure that, with all its drawbacks, Liberty was worth the winning.

It lay there now in Yorktown, almost within his grasp—unless the sea should snatch it from him. He was not much given to vainglory, and still less to self-pity: but he knew that another day or two would show whether he had given his whole life to an impossibility, or whether unborn generations would know him as the creator of a New World.

“General Washington,” said La Fayette, trying to conceal his impatience, “I think it must be time now to give the signal.”

The General continued to inspect the British trenches through his spy-glass. “M. De La Fayette,” he answered, “I think your watch must have gone fast. I arranged with M. Le Marquis to commence the cannonade at eight of the clock.”

YOUNG COUNT AXEL FERSEN had walked fifty yards from the big marquee, and come to a halt at the side of the dusty track. He felt a fool for having left Lameth and the others so abruptly, and with so poor an excuse. But to return now, without allowing a little time to pass, might look more foolish still.

He told himself that it was very uncomfortable, priggish even, to call oneself 'an observer', and sit there so coldly among the band of enthusiasts—Mr. Neilson, offering his home as a target for cannon-balls, St. Simon storming towards his visionary future for Mankind, even Berthier with his worship of System and Routine. He envied them a little, was a little afraid of becoming—as the world now went—a permanent spectator, cut off from all that was best in life. But his own nature, and the training he had had from his father, left him unavoidably uneasy in contact with enthusiasms.

He sat down for a moment on a bank of sun-scorched grass. He would not yet admit to himself that it was only Lameth's clumsy *innuendo* that had driven him from the tent. He had volunteered for American service in order to leave Versailles and put an end to that foolish story. What could there possibly be between a young Swedish lieutenant and the wife of King Louis of France?

He had certainly been greatly attracted at their first meeting, when she was the little bride of the Dauphin, whom all France was agreeing to love. She could hardly have retained, as she grew to Queenship, that heavenly simplicity, that young delight in friends and the country and the faces of children, that refreshingly un-Queenly impatience with the pomp and politics of Court. But he could not help regretting that the change in her seemed so complete—while the love of France had turned so swiftly to misrepresentation and calumny. One could blame much on her husband, on the worthy dolt who had not known how to respond to her

generous warmth. But, wherever the fault lay, all that was most lovable in her seemed now to be overlaid with things he could neither love nor understand. He was glad to be at a safe distance from her, impervious to her dubious magic. In any case, she was a mother—perhaps already mother to two children, if the talk of the French camp was correct in its anticipations. She had once been interested in the young Count Fersen—inviting him to her parties, indiscreetly asking to see him in his Swedish uniform; but circumstance would now have elbowed him out of her mind, as (he feared) it would always elbow him out of the mainstream of life, into inactivity and coldly disinterested observation.

A regiment was coming up the road, American Continentals advancing to support the batteries. He stood up, preparing to salute their officers. He must go back to the tent as soon as they were passed.

He was suddenly aware of the birds that chattered round him in the hedge. They seemed almost to be mocking him—mocking his scruples and his 'safe distance'. He knew that the three thousand miles were hateful to him, that he wanted to be close to her now, holding her hand and listening to her voice. He remembered the intoxication of their first meeting, the unknown partner at the masked ball, the mischievous eyes that had sparkled at him through the silken eye-slits—Innocence and Mystery combining to stamp their image on his heart. He could still hear the rustle of her skirt as she scampered away from him across the ballroom floor. Even then he had known that she would come back to him, again and again, until Death stopped all dancing, and tore the mask from every face.

The soldiers were abreast of him, tattered ranks with no cohesion—only the rhythm of marching feet. La Fayette had not exaggerated; there were men without uniforms, many naked but for a couple of stitched blankets; there was hardly a musket that was not eaten through with rust. Liberty was not liberal when it came to equipping its humbler champions. One could only guess what had kept them marching through long years of hunger and defeat. They saw little of the meagre pay that was promised them. They followed General Washington,

whom it was easy and necessary to admire but very hard to love. Did they indeed march in anger against Kings, in indignation at misgovernment, in thirst for this thing called Freedom?

Axel von Fersen, watching the bronzed faces jog past him, wished that he himself could feel some such thirst for an abstraction. The marching men were happier than he, knowing what they wanted, and content to be starved and maimed and killed rather than return to comfort without it. He had wandered out of a tent, and must now wander back, because he did not know whether or not he was in love with a woman he could never have.

VI

GENERAL WASHINGTON SNAPPED his spy-glass shut and replaced it carefully in his pocket. He glanced impassively at La Fayette, drew out a silver-mounted watch, and turned politely to his General of Artillery.

"Mr. Knox," he said, "I would be obliged if you would instruct the batteries to open fire."

As the guns spoke, first by twos and threes, then with a long-drawn roar that shook the whole peninsula, a great cloud of birds surged up from the thickets and winged their way westward in alarm. Beneath their fleeting shadow, men hauled at gun-wheels, men panted under ammunition-baskets and cursed the unevenness of track and scrub. As the British guns replied, there were some that dropped wounded, others that fell as corpses across the trails and touch-holes. Behind the vast sickle of smoke and noise, the infantry waited in silence for the order to charge such ruins as the batteries could make—White coats and ragged Blue ready to swarm upon Scarlet and rip them to death with steel.

They waited in vain.

There was no need for steel. Before Yorktown church had struck ten, a scarlet drummer was seen to clamber out from the trenches and beat a signal that was inaudible amidst the cannon. Behind came an officer, shaking a flag of truce. My Lord Cornwallis had despaired of his fleet and despaired of further resistance: he thought it his duty to save his men from dying for nothing, like rats in a hopeless trap. If King George sent neither ships nor succour, then King George could not complain at his army surrendering to this strange alliance of King Louis and the rebels.

As the Englishmen marched out to the field of surrender, there were old soldiers among them weeping like children at the disgrace, which neither they nor their General could have prevented. They knew little of Liberty—save as a catchword among fools and gentry—but they had been taught much

about Honour. They would cheerfully have died for that abstraction—even if their death could have helped no man and altered nothing.

Only the bandmasters of the army seemed to have caught a hint that something other than Honour had now come to rule the wars of men. For as King George's regiments marched out to the slopes where muskets must be grounded and swords handed over to the enemy, the drums and fifes were playing an old English tune called, *The World Turned Upside Down*.



CHAPTER TWO

OLD WORLD (1783-4)

*“ Nous pouvons
supporter ni nos maux,
ni leurs remèdes ”*

Quoted from Livy
in a letter from
France in 1784.

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I

HERR SECRETARY ADLERBETH, plump, good-natured, and rather pleased with himself, sat reading a guide-book to Florence in the entrance-hall of the old Palazzo. The winter sunshine of the south, streaming in from a deep-set window above him, showed every stain on the peeling walls, and cast deep shadows round the carved coat-of-arms—the somewhat unexpected Lion and Unicorn, ramping at the leopards and lilies of England.

Secretary Adlerbeth was a trifle less plump than he had been a few months back. When one travelled with one's employer, and one's employer was King Gustav of Sweden, the stages were long and exhausting, the meals hasty, and a good night's sleep a rarity. But it had all been abundantly worth it; the journey was the crowning step to Adlerbeth's ladder of long-cherished ambitions. It was not every provincial lawyer's son whose conscientiousness was rewarded by a post at the Court. It was not every Court official who could get his poems and translations printed, his company sought in the literary circles of Stockholm. And if the more established writers, with their patronage and condescension, still tried to make him feel a provincial outsider, they would hardly be able to do so after he had been to Italy, after he had visited Rome itself.

Within a week, Adlerbeth would be travelling in King Gustav's wake to drink deep (by the aid of guide-books) at that fountain-head of all Culture. Returning from Rome, he would be able to patronise his patrons, to make the Stockholm scribblers feel provincial in their turn.

Adlerbeth was already preparing the way for his triumphal home-coming. He was sending back long letters, telling how he had seen all that ought to be seen, and saying about them exactly what ought to be said: the pompous style of his letters was extremely flattering to his own conventional soul, innocent of a single spark of originality. Only when he forgot about pictures and churches and statues in order to comment on

human beings, Secretary Adlerbeth's letters showed a kindly shrewdness that was all the better for having escaped the careful cultivation with which he cramped his other talents.

He did not mind being kept waiting on the ground-floor of the decayed Palazzo. He was too happy educating himself in the wonders of the recently-visited Pitti, the ecstasies of the sight-seeing that awaited him in the Sistine Chapel. He did not even notice that another man, a fellow-countryman, had already entered, and was standing opposite him with a gentle smile of amusement.

"Are there no servants about?" asked the newcomer.

Adlerbeth rose hastily, pocketing his book. He saw that it was Fersen: Fersen, returning to France with the dust of America hardly shaken from his boots, had received a polite order to join the King's travelling-party in Italy.

"I told the servants not to wait," said Adlerbeth. "His Highness has very few, and I expect they are busy. How he lives on the money at all! It's a tragic thing, considering what he has been—or ought to have been. And I wanted a moment alone, just to warn you before we go up——"

"Oh, I've been warned! I know all the *faux pas* one can make here." Fersen looked up at the coat-of-arms and then at the cracked banisters of the staircase. "I thought the King was coming himself," he said.

"He'll be here soon. He wanted us two to go ahead."

"Oh?" said Fersen. "To prepare an entrance for him? Has he written a good scene for himself?"

Adlerbeth looked hurt: Royalist and incipient playwright, he hated sneers at King Gustav's theatrical tastes.

"When you are marching a Regiment," he said with a touch of pedantry, "do you not sometimes throw out an advance guard?"

Fersen shrugged his shoulders. "Not unless one is in hostile country," he answered. "And I thought this was to be a friendly visit. . . . Unless it's true that they're wanting to sell us something, and then, of course, they're enemies!" He walked to the foot of the staircase, and put his hand on the worn newel-post of the stairs. "But I can't help feeling sorry for our host," he said. "It's a mistake to try and be a King

these days, unless you're born to a nice, comfortable throne with nobody to challenge your rights."

"Gustav has made a success of being King," answered Adlerbeth. "It was a poor throne he was born to, and he's made it more than comfortable: he's made it great."

"That's as may be," replied Fersen, sliding his white hand up the banisters. "My father and the friends that come to dine with him at Blasieholm would not agree with your sentiments about King Gustav."

Adlerbeth felt more riled than ever. Fersen's father had been a leader of the great clique of nobles who had governed Sweden for fifty years, more powerful than Sweden's king. Adlerbeth, besides being Secretary, was Keeper of the Antiquities, and he had seen the wooden stamp they had made from the old King's signature, so that they could ratify their laws in defiance of his royal will. It was a museum-piece now; King Gustav had routed the aristocrats and made himself very much a King. Young Fersen (though his father might still grumble) belonged to the younger generation that should have learnt a proper loyalty. Adlerbeth would have liked to tell him so, if only he could make opportunity for a protest. But Fersen was already mounting the stairs—moving with that easy grace which Adlerbeth could envy and appreciate, but never, for all his culture and poetising, hope to acquire himself.

But the opportunity came. On the third step, Fersen paused to speak. "Do you know how I first saw the King?" he asked. "My father sent me from Blasieholm with a letter. I found the whole Court sitting round the stage of the little theatre there, dressed as Turks and Tartars; he'd called them to a rehearsal and then gone off to talk business with his Finance Minister. I found him discussing the Bohuslän fisheries, dressed and made up as the Grand Cham. I think it was for one of his own plays, but I can't be sure."

"They were good plays," said Adlerbeth pointedly, "and there are more fish caught in Bohuslän nowadays than there were in his father's reign. Or ought I to say, *your* father's reign?"

A momentary shadow of irritation passed over Fersen's face. Then he made the fencer's gesture towards his chest. "*Touché!*"

he said with a friendly smile to Adlerbeth, and passed on up the stairs.

The Herr Sekretare followed. As he mounted, he cast one more glance at the Royal Arms of England, wondering what manner of man sported them in this unlikely setting. In a minute or two, he would know.

II

"DON'T CRY, SOPHIE, DON'T CRY, my darling. Tell me all about it, and let's see if I can help."

The Countess Fersen sat by the open window of Blasieholm with her daughter's head buried in her lap; she ran a soothing hand over the mass of golden hair.

"No one can help me, Mother," Sophie choked back her sobs. "I can't even tell you what's wrong; I don't know myself. It's just—everything. He's very kind to me. I think he loves me—in his own way. But we've been married seven years now and . . . oh, what's the good? I can't tell you!"

"Perhaps I know. Perhaps I can guess."

"You can't, Mother. Not possibly. You've always been so happy with Father. Adolf's a good man, I suppose, but he could never, never mean to me what Father has meant to you. And then you've always had *us*, Axel and me and the other two. You'd never understand how I feel."

"Perhaps you're right, Sophie." The Countess smiled a rather sad smile. Her gaze travelled over the panelled walls of the Library: there hung the rows of dead Fersens in their gilt frames, men and women who had lived here at Blasieholm, with human hearts, presumably, under their ruffs and breast-plates, their brocade gowns and jewelled bodices: there stood the door of the little writing-cabinet where Count Fredrik sat closeted with his morning's letters. She sighed and turned back towards the window; it was better to watch the dancing of the little harbour waves, the thousand roofs of Stockholm sparkling in the brilliance of a Swedish June. Thirty-two years at Blasieholm had made the view a familiar one, but at least it conveyed more meaning to her than it had on her bridal day.

"It's often a relief," she said, "to try and tell someone else about one's troubles—if you have anyone to tell."

Sophie sat up, drying her sea-grey eyes with a little lace handkerchief. The slightly boyish look on her face gave her a

kind of innocence unusual at her age, and certainly not cultivated in the circles among which birth and circumstances had placed her. King Gustav was no libertine, but his Court was hardly a stronghold of virtue.

"I don't know why I should bother you, Mother," said Sophie more cheerfully. "Especially when I don't know what's wrong myself." She, too, looked out of the window, at the shuttered Palace across the water. "Things will be more lively soon," she said, "when the King comes back from Italy and France. I shall probably forget I was ever unhappy—I'm sure I shall if he brings Somebody home with him—— No, I'm not thinking of my dear old watchdog, I'm thinking of Axel. I wonder what Axel's doing now, this very minute. Visiting some fearful old ruin, I suppose in Florence or Rome or somewhere. I hope they don't stay too long in Paris on the way back. I'm longing to have Axel home for a month or two."

"A month or two? I can't see why Axel shouldn't come home for good."

The Countess spoke as though trying to convince herself of what she knew to be a castle in the air. Sophie pursed her lips, and the two sat in silence.

The Countess was still wondering if she could not help her daughter—wondering, at least, if she could discover her secret. "The King's brother is back in Stockholm," she said. "I suppose you knew."

"Which brother? Prince Carl, or Father's namesake?"

"Why do you call him that? Are you afraid to say 'Fredrik'?"

"Afraid? Why should I be?" Sophie was not committing herself.

"I wish the King would give Prince Fredrik something more to do," said her mother. "He's the sort of man that's always the worse for being kept idle."

"He might not do it very well!" Sophie laughed with quite unnecessary loudness. "Fredrik will never be anything but a graceful idler." She stared boldly at her mother. "It's no good looking at me like that," she said. "I'm not hankering to be Princess Fredrik. I'm very glad it all came to nothing. At least, I——"

She fell suddenly silent, with an almost imperceptible droop at the corners of her mouth. She turned away, looking out of the window again. She saw neither Palace nor harbour: she saw only a picture, already a little blurred, of a young man with a weak but charming face, a very different face from Adolf's. He was younger brother to a King, and without the King's talents or energy or strange tenacity. For that very reason he was the more in need of help. It took her a minute or two to dispel the vision, and be glad that it could be dispelled.

She looked round at her mother again. "I had another letter from Axel to-day," she said. "Written before he left France for Italy. I brought it round to read to you."

"You mean—to read part of it to me." The Countess smiled indulgently. "You and Axel always had your secrets."

Sophie pouted. "Well, some of it *is* a little private," she said. "Other people's secrets. Things are so complicated at Versailles." She was already crackling the fine French note-paper, folding back the page that most needed censorship. The Countess smiled again; but as she settled back in her chair to listen to as much as her daughter permitted, she saw Sophie look up and hastily re-pocket the letter. Then she saw that the study door was already half open, and heard her husband's voice.

"Are you there, Katarina? Can you come in a moment?"

"Yes, if you want me! Did you know Sophie was here?"

"Sophie? Oh? Glad to see you, my dear." The door opened further and the Count's face came into sight. It was a wise, generous, good-natured face, but certainly not oversensitive. In that matter, Axel took after his mother.

"Don't lead her away into the study," said Sophie, after the exchange of dutiful kisses. "I'm only here for a minute or two. Adolf said I must be back by midday."

"Well now that you've come—I suppose there's no harm in discussing these questions *en famille*." Count Fredrik seemed to hesitate, as though unwilling to form a council in which women should have a clear numerical majority.

"Discuss what, Papa?"

"I've just had a letter from Paris. A proposal about Axel." The Count looked down at the paper in his hand. "Do either

of you know anything of this Necker person? He's said to be as rich as Croesus. He tells me in his letter that Pitt—the English minister, you know—made him an offer for his daughter's hand. I gather she has a reputation in Paris for literary productions; but that would not be an insurmountable objection, so long as her dowry was satisfactory. Do I accept for Axel where the great Mr. Pitt has been refused?"

"Necker? Necker?" said the Countess. "I seem to have read about him in the newspapers."

"That's just it." Her husband smiled grimly. "Newspapers will say anything these days, and this fellow has plenty of money to buy scribblers to puff his reputation. A banker, if you please! I would never have thought of such a thing in the old days." He looked out of a window, across the water to the Palace. There had been a time before King Gustav's reign, when travellers had said that the real palace was on St. Blaise's island—Blasieholm, in the uncouth Swedish tongue.

"Things are different nowadays," he said. "And it is certainly time we got the boy married."

"I'd rather it was a banker's daughter," said the Countess, "than some Marquise about Court that would never let Axel leave Versailles. I'm sure it's time we saw a little more of him at home."

"Oh, as far as that goes," answered her husband, "this Necker person seems to be more exacting than any Marquis. He takes it for granted that his daughter will live in France, whoever she marries. I suppose the objection to Mr. Pitt as a son-in-law would be that he could not govern England from Paris! He talks about getting King Gustav to appoint Axel Ambassador in Paris, but that would cost Heaven knows what—far more than the colonelcy of the French Regiment I'm supposed to be buying Axel. The boy will be the ruin of me, before I've done with him."

Like many rich men, the Count took a queer pleasure in persuading himself that he was always on the verge of bankruptcy. The Countess was not thinking of money—except as an excuse.

"A French regiment?" she asked. "Stationed in France? I see no reason why you should pay for that. And I certainly

see no reason to buy a foreign embassy for Axel so that you can marry him to a blue-stockings in Paris!" She looked up at the portraits on the wall and wondered if she dared for once to make allies of them. "I should not have thought," she ventured, "that Fersen wanted a banker's daughter in the family!"

"We are not our ancestors, my dear!"

Sophie, listening in silence, was amused to hear a more dictatorial tone creeping into her father's voice as he encountered the beginnings of opposition. "The French think very highly of M. Necker," he continued. "He is of a Swiss family, and it is only a very distinguished and talented foreigner—especially when he is a Protestant—who can become a minister of France; M. Necker has been in office once and hopes to be again."

The oratorical manner reached its climax and then gave place to a more matter-of-fact one. "The money seems almost unlimited," concluded Count Fredrik, "and the girl is an only child. I shall write to M. Necker and say that I am quite willing to hear more."

"I wish I knew what makes you consult me," said the Countess, "when you've already made up your mind that my feelings on the subject are of no importance. Axel is my son; I have hardly seen him since he was eighteen, and I consider that——"

"As you have just reminded me," interrupted her husband, "Axel is a Fersen. People in our position have no business to indulge their 'feelings', their weaknesses as I should prefer to call them, at the expense of . . . well, of more important considerations. My duty as a father——"

"Oh, do as you like! Only I——"

"Please don't quarrel!" Sophie rose as she spoke and put a hand into the crook of her father's arm. "I shall have to be going in a moment, and I don't want to leave a civil war behind me." She laughed away the gathering frown on Count Fredrik's face. "And anyway," she said, "there's one thing you both seem to have forgotten. You haven't heard yet what Axel thinks of this Mademoiselle Necker."

"Oh, as to that——" A single gesture sufficed to show how

unimportant Count Fredrik considered his son's opinions. "It's merely a question of what is best for the boy's future—and for the family. And your mother knows as well as I do——"

"I'm off!" interrupted Sophie. "I know it's going to be civil war. I shall be late, too, and Adolf is almost as good as Papa at scolding his wife. No, I'm not complaining. He's generally in the right—if that's any virtue!" She tripped away, and suddenly picked up a book at random from the table. With her back turned to her father, she managed to slip Axel's letter into it before she turned back to her mother with a signal of her hand. "Here's the book I brought you," she said, returning. She smiled comfortingly: life was a hard matter for wives and mothers, and it might be a consolation to the countess to read the whole letter uncensored.

Count Fredrik, being quite uninterested in the kind of book that ladies lend one another, had already turned away towards the study door. But even after Sophie had kissed her parents and swum out of the room, he lingered a little, with eyes fixed pensively upon his wife.

"Had Sophie been crying," he asked, "—just before I came in?"

"What made you think that?" The Countess opened wide eyes: she was genuinely surprised (and not for the first time) to find her husband more observant than she generally thought him.

"I hope," he said, "that she isn't finding Adolf too much of a trial. Young men nowadays—not that he's as young as all that—— Marriage is a complicated——" The Count seemed unable to finish a sentence.

"I think he does everything he can to make her happy."

"Oh, I don't doubt it. Everything he can! Only Sophie is rather—— I wonder if she is taking proper care of her health. I've a good mind to send our good Doctor Rossi round there to scold her about all these late nights and rich suppers."

The Countess was silent a moment. "If only Sophie had children," she said, "she'd have more to occupy her mind."

"You don't think," the Count looked almost shyly at his wife, "you don't think she's still thinking about that Prince

Fredrik affair? I know I am prejudiced against the whole family, King Gustav and both his brothers. But the man was obviously a waster, and a marriage between Blasieholm and the Palace—that would never have done.” His voice had recovered its old confidence. “I feel sure it would never have done,” he repeated.

He began to pace the room. The Countess, with her handkerchief poised as a screen over her lap, was already reading Axel’s letter. It seemed an ordinary enough record of Court festivities in France, before he had joined King Gustav and his friends on their Italian journey, of plays and music and supper parties at the Queen’s Trianon. But between the lines, a mother could read of something—not a coloneley, nor even a rich heiress—that was likely to keep Axel in France for the better part of his life.

“I’m afraid you are thinking,” said Count Fredrik, trying not to be nettled by her silence, “that I was wrong about that business of the King’s brother.”

“No. Oh, no! Sophie would have been much more unhappy if anything had come of it. I was only thinking that things aren’t turning out as well for any of our children as I used to hope. I don’t know why one always expects them to be luckier than one has been oneself.”

“Then that wasn’t what she was crying about?”

“No. Yes. Just life in general, I suppose.”

It sounds to me as if it *was* a case for Doctor Rossi—and a good stiff dose.”

“I don’t know why you always have such confidence in your Doctor Rossi,” she said, smiling. “I suppose it’s because he’s a Persen family institution. And anyway, I’m sure it’s no good dosing my little Sophie. I expect she’ll discover her own way out of her troubles. And you’ll be late for dinner if you don’t go and finish your letters.”

Count Fredrik seemed to hesitate, as though wondering whether to frown at his wife or come over and kiss her. In the end he did neither. “Perhaps you are right,” he said, and walked out to resume his work; the Countess was left with a vista of sunlit roofs to look at, a daughter’s problems to consider, and her son’s letter on her lap.

III

FAR AWAY IN FLORENCE COUNTESS FERSEN'S son was preceding King Gustav's secretary up the stairs of the dusty Palazzo. On the first landing they all but collided with a lacquey who was hurrying across, a soiled plate in his hand. His clothes were seedy, his wig had not been dressed for a month and more. He took their names, hid his plate under a chair, and flung open the dining-room doors. His master, it appeared, was becoming too much of an invalid to get about his lodgings easily; he received guests in the room where he breakfasted and dined and even (to judge by an ill-fitting cover to the sofa in the corner) where he retired his few steps to bed.

He was speaking as they entered. "Yes? Yes? Who is it?" they heard him say. Another servant bent down and re-whispered the names to him. He was sitting, with slippered feet on a footstool, in a high-backed, dimly brocaded armchair. His shoulders were pathetically bowed. There was dignity as well as kindness in his bloodshot eyes and puckered forehead; but it was a dignity that now fought a losing battle—after sixty hard-lived years—against decrepitude and a failing memory. His clothes were hardly better than those of his servants. But across his tarnished coat he wore, as always, the Blue Ribbon of the Garter.

Fersen had seen one English King, in St. James's Palace, and had been witness, beyond the Atlantic, to the way in which his ministers had bungled away his Empire. Here was another who had never seen St. James's, who had never had ministers, nor an Empire to play with. He had played royally with all that Chance had allowed him: he had been a true king in the spirit of his gambling. For the feeble old feet on the footstool had once led an army from Glen Finnan to Derby, from Derby to Culloden; the cracked voice had once shouted above the waving claymores, of a scabbard thrown away. This crippled recluse in a Florentine backwater, might now style himself

King Charles III, but was better known to the world as the Bonnie Prince Charlie of half-legendary achievement.

"From Sweden?" he was saying. "Bring the gentlemen chairs, Giuseppe! Yes, from Sweden. I have always had a great regard for their nation." He seemed to be fumbling backwards in his memory, wondering how Sweden had ever meant anything to him. There had once been a King Charles, a Carl XII of Sweden, who had raised forces to restore his father to the English throne; but all that was forgotten now; everything was forgotten except old age and hopes that could never be realised.

"Will the gentlemen take brandy?" he asked suddenly; his eyes wandered over the half-cleared table and came to rest upon a decanter, as though upon something that had once meant comfort but might now mean despair "I never . . . nowadays . . ." he faltered, "but my guests. . . . Is there any brandy for the gentlemen?"

The embarrassed servant took a step towards the table, but Fersen signalled to him with a tiny shake of the head. The old man did not press his invitation; he seemed to have fallen into a kind of lethargy. Fersen looked round the room: everything told the same tale, of the attempt to maintain a royal state on revenues that were anything but royal. The only unexpected object was beneath the windows, a figure apparently, and almost a life-sized one, draped over with drab-coloured canvas.

"Where did you say you came from?" asked the old man suddenly.

"We are from Sweden," repeated Adlerbeth, with a stiff little bow. "His Highness the Count of Haga sent us ahead to ask——"

"Ah, yes! That's your King, isn't it? I, too, have to use an incognito. I shall call myself Count Albany until the time comes to return to London as King. The other Kings. . . . His Holiness the Pope . . . but I need not trouble Your Majesty with all that. I expect Your Majesty has his own anxieties—Parliaments and so forth." He was looking at Fersen, and leaving no opportunity to correct his misapprehensions. "I wonder that Your Majesty considers it politic to

leave things and travel. I shall not travel again, once I return to London. But I am glad others have the leisure." He smiled a curiously winning smile; if all else had deserted Prince Charlie, his charm still lingered on.

"His Majesty will be here soon," said Fersen gently. "We came ahead to present his compliments. He is leaving Florence soon, and we heard you had something to show him."

"Oh? So you are not——? What did you say your name was?" The smile was as friendly as ever.

"Fersen. Hans Axel von Fersen. Your Majesty may have heard of my father. I have not yet had an opportunity to make my own name famous."

"Fersen? Von Fersen? Oh, yes. A very great name." It was amusingly obvious that His Majesty had never heard it before. "And your King—I should say, the Count of Haga—is coming to see the—er—present I wanted to make him before he leaves Florence. . . . Swedish, you said? Always had a great regard . . ."

"There is a legend in our family," said Fersen, "that the Fersens came originally from Your Majesty's Dominions—from Scotland. I have heard that there is still a family called Mac-Fersen in the Scottish Highlands. Perhaps Your Majesty knows of them."

There was a long silence, so long that Fersen looked towards Adlerbeth as though wondering if this were one of the *faux pas* against which he should have accepted warning. Adlerbeth's eyes were straying round the room, putting its shabby furniture and cheap pictures into his mental note-book. The silence grew uncomfortable. Perhaps the old man had not heard—or perhaps it had meant nothing to him. But his smile had given place to a sterner expression that seemed to date from half a century ago. There was a smouldering in the dim pupils of his eyes.

"They were on the left wing," he said suddenly. "The Macphersons were on the left at Falkirk. They did what they could, but the luck was against them. Murray and the Macdonalds won the battle on the right, chasing Ligonier's dragoons back into their own infantry, and getting their whole army on the run." He leant forward, thumbing a rough

battle-plan on his knee, among the creases of his worn silken breeches. "My poor friend Macpherson brought his clansmen up smartly enough, and then found a ravine in front of him that prevented him getting to close quarters with Huske's men. I remember it even spoilt the pursuit when they ran away, and most of George's men escaped along the 'Lithgow road. Things might be very different now if we'd been able to pursue properly after Falkirk. Very different from . . . If . . ."

A sudden look of despair came over the old man's face. The fire died out of his eyes. "No good remembering," he muttered, and his trembling hands fell back into his lap.

"His Highness is bringing Count Armfelt to-day," said Adlerbeth. "Did Your Highness know that Count Armfelt's father marched in your army during the 1745 campaign?"

There was no response. The figure in the high-backed chair seemed to have shrunk into insignificant frailty. The campaign of '45 was altogether forgotten. The dull eyes were fixed again upon Fersen, and with kindly interest.

"What did you say your Christian name was?" the old man asked.

"Axel, Your Majesty, Hans Axel. My father is Count Fredrik Axel."

"I thought so. Axle." Charles gave a little chuckle. "Do you know what that means in English? It means a piece of a coach."

"It means the same in Swedish, Your Majesty. I have often wondered how it came to be a name."

"Surely," said Adlerbeth, "the name comes from the other meaning? 'Axel' also means a shoulder in our language, Your Highness. I had an uncle in Jönköping who was called Axel, and we young people used to nickname him 'Shoulder of Mutton'."

Adlerbeth, having delivered the witticism, suddenly blushed scarlet and felt hot under his wig. He really must cure himself of these middle-class reminiscences: he must also cure himself of the habit of blushing. He was relieved to see that neither of the others seemed to have noticed his self-discomfiture.

"A shoulder," said King Charles, as though considering

some new joke that was not entirely a joke. "Is dinner ready?" he asked suddenly, ". . . or have we had dinner?"

His question remained unanswered. There were sounds outside, steps and scurrings on the stairs. The two Swedes looked towards the door. King Charles seemed to realise that he was already ceasing to be the centre of attention; he sat there, with the pitiful acquiescence of old age, twisting his gnarled fingers on his lap. Adlerbeth had risen, and begun to dust fluff off his coat-skirts, with a watchful eye for a possible entrance. Fersen sat on, as if in sympathy with the noble ruin at his side. It would be time to get up when King Gustav made his entrance.

Fersen had left Sweden in his teens and knew little of his King except through letters from home—Sophie's, babbling of the elegance and splendour that Gustav had bestowed on the Swedish Court, Count Fredrik's sombre, more judicious, but undeniably prejudiced in a contrary direction. It is not easy to remain fair-minded towards a younger man that has ousted one from great power. The elderly gentleman who gathered round Count Fredrik's dining-table needed little excuse, if they could not see anything very glorious in the Royal Revolution that had ended the long reign of the Swedish House of Peers, and left the Crown free to govern by means of the conscientious young Adlerbeths, and the less conscientious young sparks whose handsome faces took King Gustav's fancy. It was not surprising if Count Fredrik's son, reading between the lines of his father's letters, gathered that King Gustav, with all his talents and enthusiasms, could be regarded as something of a mountebank and something of a disaster. Nor had Axel grasped, in spite of his travels and observations, in what peril Monarchy stood everywhere, and how much that is prized by gentlemen, young or old, might swiftly perish beneath its ruins. One peep into a rapidly-approaching future would have made him rise quicker and more respectfully from his chair when the footman (skilled in incognitos) threw open the door to announce "The Count of Haga," and ushered in, certainly not the greatest, and yet perhaps the most extraordinary man that was ever born to a throne.

Not that King Gustav, to speak precisely, allowed himself to

be ushered. He waited a moment, for everything must be exactly timed. Then, just when his audience had begun to imagine that the pause preceded the arrival of exacting Arrogance, a slight, frail figure stepped in, almost with the dancer's trip, and stood bowing respect with the most delicate consideration towards grandeur in eclipse. There was no flicker of an eye at threadbare carpet or moth-gnawn window-curtains. There was only the friendly glance to the two young Swedes that had been his harbingers, and then, as he approached the invalid's chair, the solicitous courtesy of one gentleman to another, of a young King to his elder cousin. If the man was an actor, never was acting so sincere. For King Gustav's enemies, those who abused him with every name in the calendar of duplicity, found it difficult to deny his unwearied kindness, his almost morbid fear of inflicting pain on any fellow-creature.

Fersen watched him bowing and pouring compliments on his host, while good manners fought with pity in his wide, dark eyes and strangely irregular face. It was difficult to see in him the King, and the successful King, of a rude and pugnacious people. It was difficult to remember the single drastic stroke with which he had put down Sweden's mighty from their seats, and impoverished her tenacious rich. It would be easier to imagine some power behind the scenes, some soldier or intriguer, bent on using King Gustav as a puppet; one could imagine that some such man had gathered the secret regiments for the Royal Revolution, to unmask them with ruthless skill. But Gustav had never trusted his fortunes to any other, and was no man's puppet but his own. He had so used his triumph as to show who was its author. The regiments had never been loosed to kill; even when the threat of them had sufficed and Revenge would have been safe, no drop of blood had fallen to expiate the fifty years' humiliation of a proud and kingly power. If there had been scaffoldings, they were only for festivals and pageants. Axel, far away on his travels, had heard news of the anxious day in Stockholm, when so many Peers had gone to the Riksdag, the Parliament of Sweden, and not returned that night. Their wives and children had sat at home, fearing they might never return; but such fears were

soon quieted by polite notes from the King, apologising for detaining Count So-and-so, the Baron Such-and-such for a few days in the Royal Palace. He assured their families that everything was being done for their lordships' comfort and even dignity. He begged them not to be anxious. Old men that could remember bloodier days shook their heads and said that such a Revolution, smelling of Comic Opera, could not possibly last a fortnight. It had now lasted eleven years, Gustav could leave an obedient Kingdom behind him while he dazzled Europe with his flying visits. And poor old Europe, struggling painfully with the forces that, in his own country, King Gustav seemed to treat as playthings, watched him perplexedly and could not guess the secret of his triumph.

There had been a time when Prince Charles Edward, if he could not have guessed the secret in another, might have discovered it in himself. Circumstance had thwarted the discovery, buffeting him across the world until he was a penniless dotard, grateful for the attentions of young men whose names he was already beginning to forget. There had been no time, and never would be a time, when Secretary Adlerbeth could guess it; Secretary Adlerbeth's function was to admire, to take for granted, and to obey. But there might be some inkling of a guess in Axel Fersen's mind, and, with it, some stirrings of envy at a success from which (even if birth and position had given opportunity) his own scruples would have debarred him. For Axel had seen Single-mindedness at work elsewhere, in General Washington and others, though never a single-mindedness that was forced to hide itself behind such multitudinous masks. He had also had some experience of the power of Imagination. He might vaguely resent this unusual combination of the two, but he could estimate something of their united power.

If he himself was to be eternally audience rather than actor, here was a play that was well worth the watching. It was none the worse for re-opening in the shabby scenery of the old Palazzo, with young and still unthwarted Royalty paying court to the remnants of a King.

The stage was growing more crowded, as King Gustav's

friends came entering on his heels. He had brought those most likely to impress a foreign audience, leaving behind most of the patient toilers who maintained his power and found money for his splendours. Here came many young aristocrats whom he had persuaded to share his charioted triumph over the *débris* of their father's power. Here came Taube, first to be so persuaded, who had brought up his dragoon regiment when Gustav decided to be King. Here was broad-browed Cederström, Admiral of the Navy which Gustav was raising out of the corruption and impotence in which the reign of the nobles had let it sink. With him walked old Sparre, who had been a soldier when the nobles gambled away half Swedish Pomerania in a needless and incompetent war; he was now a planner of towns, with his head full of schemes for beautifying Stockholm, loveliest of Europe's cities. But before them all marched Mauritz Armfelt, with the handsome and impudent face—Armfelt that would cheerfully accept the command of a dozen regiments, the planning of twenty capitals, and come smiling to Gustav for approval of any brilliant folly he committed with them. As they advanced to pay their compliments, Gustav tuned their talk with the skill of a practised conductor, while his great eyes shone mischievously at Armfelt or were veiled in deference to his host. The old man sat silent and confused. Sometimes he would look at the wine and brandy that the servants were handing to his guests; then his gaze would turn away (as from a thing forbidden), and rest perhaps on young Fersen, perhaps on nothing at all.

"I hope Your Highness is not overwhelmed," said King Gustav, "by the new Gothic invasion. Adlerbeth here has been calculating that it is just thirteen and a half centuries since our ancestors sacked Rome. Even the Goth can grow civilised in that time. I am plundering Italy of some pictures and statues, but I pay for what I take."

"The Goth can also grow bored," said Armfelt, while a servant bent down to whisper in Charles's ear: "We get less amusement from Italy than our uncivilised ancestors."

"Mauritz is always bored," said Gustav, "unless he's doing something that he oughtn't to be doing." He took a chair beside his host. "Pity the poor King that has the double

anxiety of governing Sweden by post and making Mauritz behave himself in foreign countries."

"No one will be able to make me behave myself when we get to France," answered Armfelt with a twinkle. "I wonder His Majesty here does not find lodging in Paris instead of this dead-and-alive Florence."

There was a sudden hush: King Charles was heard to mutter something about France that was not to that country's credit—something about being refused a refuge there at the bidding of a usurper from Hanover.

"Kings—rightful Kings——" he said, "should be more careful of each other's interests in times like ours. France repudiated my alliance with him just when he should have been bringing it to fruit."

The servant at his elbow grew more insistent in his whispering, and began to point to the canvas-shrouded figure beneath the windows. At the same moment—as if to mark his meaning—the door opened to admit a late-comer, the sculptor, Sergel. He was a large man, but his huge head outmatched his corpulent body; he filled the doorway, making his grudging bow, and then shambling self-consciously towards the footman who was distributing brandy. Sergel had too great a reputation to need good manners. When he was not plunged in the melancholia that made a recurrent torment of his life, he could fashion bronze or marble into statues which even the Italians acknowledged as marvels of grace and proportion. King Gustav had been fortunate in finding excellent Swedish poets to be the glory of his reign, and had used his good fortune generously; but he was still luckier to have among his subjects an undoubted genius whose works needed no translation to make Sweden famous.

Sergel slumped into a chair while the canvas round the figure was being unwound. Charles began to falter something about a genuine product of ancient Roman or even Grecian art—"so the *connoisseurs* tell me. I have had less time to study such matters than I should have liked." He explained that he was, temporarily, a poor man, but had wanted to find some gift . . . some gift for the Swedish King; on the word 'gift' his voice seemed to hesitate.

When the figure was revealed, admirals and dragoon-colonels were loud with gruff admiration. Adlerbeth also raised his voice, though with a more cautious appreciation, prudishly attempting to drown Armfelt's Rabelaisian murmurs on the subject of nudity. Sergel took one glance at the simpering Diana with her lop-sided stag, and swung quickly away from it to beckon to a servant for more brandy. King Gustav too, was silent, scribbling something on a piece of paper on his knee and smiling politely. Fersen wondered which of the needy *conoscitori* of Florence had been bribed by the servants to recommend so unconvincing a goddess to their master.

Gustav found a tongue at last, praising the generosity of the gift but avoiding reference to its artistic value. As he spoke, he handed his screw of paper to Adlerbeth. "Your Highness will excuse me," he apologised. "A little matter about the finances that just came into my mind. I always forget these things if I don't write them down on the spot."

"My father used to write," said Charles, as if glad already to escape from the subject of 'gifts' and sculpture. "Perhaps that was why. . . . He never saw England, you know. Never saw our Kingdom."

"My father saw England with Your Majesty," interposed Armfelt. "Your Majesty will remember a Magnus Armfelt that marched with you against King George."

There was no reply, no kindling of spent fires. For the day at least, '45 was forgotten. Gustav covered the silence. "You've no need to boast of your father," he said. "You can rely on your own misdeeds, Mauritz, to make you a reputation."

"I'd rather make one by fighting," said Armfelt. "It's time you gave Sweden a war. I'm quite jealous of our Axel here; he's had his chance in America. Is it true, Axel, that Marie-Antoinette is trying to wheedle you the command of a French regiment, in return for your service to the Revolutionaries?"

Fersen could not restrain a gesture of impatience and indignation. But his embarrassment was less than that which fell on the whole company. For King Gustav had risen, beating imperiously on the arm of his chair. He gave Armfelt a cold and quelling stare that would have been incredible a moment ago. "If Count Fersen," he said, "has been obliged by

his commission to assist rebels and traitors against their King, it is not for you, Baron Armfelt, to speak so lightly of his embarrassing duty. His Highness here has just claims to King George's throne, and justly pursued them with the sword. With the Americans, there is no question of justice. Please do not refer to the matter again in my presence!"

Charles looked up in bewilderment, and his guests were even more astonished. It was a rare thing for Gustav to interrupt Mauritz Armfelt with such a reprimand as this—or indeed with any reprimand that was more than an indulgent joke. Only a young man in the background, who had not yet spoken, seemed willing to take advantage of the rarity.

"I refused to serve in America," he said. "I resigned my French commission rather than fight for the rebels."

King Gustav was in the act of lowering his frail person back into the chair. "You resigned your commission, Pejron," he said, cuttingly, "because you had quarrelled with the Colonel of your Regiment. And you quarrelled with your Colonel because you are the kind of young fool that can't keep his temper—and will one day get yourself run through in a quite unnecessary duel. The Americans had nothing to do with it. I have nothing against them personally, but I have already said that, while they are in rebellion against their King, I do not wish to hear any further mention of them."

Pejron's interposition had increased rather than relieved the embarrassment. He did not help matters by muttering an inaudible retort; if he were presuming on his own good looks to steal some of Armfelt's position, it was clear that he still had much to learn. The others tried to revive a now lifeless conversation, and even find new praises for the half-forgotten Diana. Adlerbeth had unfolded King Gustav's note.

'Cannot possibly purchase the thing,' he read. 'Artistic conscience. But would Treasury jib at small pension for H.R.H.? Remind me to write to-night. He seems to need it badly.'

Fersen sat watching the roomful of them, and feeling strangely alien. They made a varied spectacle of which Gustav, sitting moodily back in his chair, was no longer the centre or cynosure. Like many good actors, he was deeply interested in the clothes of others, but careless, almost to

shabbiness, of his own everyday attire. Even the young puppy Pejron was more richly and far more carefully dressed. But one's eyes strayed past all, past the glittering Armfelt, to that mountainous man with a brandy glass in his hand (the hand that could work miracles with file or chisel) and with such black despair looking out from his capacious eyes.

Axel himself had known Melancholy, the sudden and unreasoned oppression that can turn youth and spring into a drab, tormenting nightmare. He remembered the earliest and bitterest taste of it, soon after his first coming to Versailles—soon after a certain masked ball, in the midst of which Melancholy would have been unthinkable. He had fled before it, from Versailles to England and Germany, from Germany to Sweden, to his parents' and sisters' home. There the cloud had imperceptibly lifted, and it had never yet descended again with its full power to torture. But now and again he had sufficient flavour of it, in moments of idleness, to dread a return and perhaps a more lasting visitation. It was not unnatural that this dread should assail him here, in this house of Hope Abandoned.

He had ceased to watch the bright company or listen to their reviving chatter. He was thinking of something that had been said before they entered: he was thinking of his Scottish kinsmen (surely the connection must be more than a legendary one?) and of a ravine which barred them from action, while other men won battles or tasted the fierce joys of a pursuit. He saw himself as one cut off from certain joys—and certain sorrows—without which a man could hardly say that he had lived: he might have to encounter Death untouched by either, with long years of emptiness to look back upon.

He rose, to mix with the others and put a stop to sickly dreams. He must talk and laugh, think about fine clothes and everyday rivalries. He must cross ribald swords with the care-free Armfelt, remembering that Life is best taken lightly.

As luck would have it, he found himself buttonholed by General Taube, as solemn as a judge. Taube had a habit of enquiring after "Your pretty sister Sophia". He was nearly old enough to be Sophie's father, but had remained unmarried—and had attended her wedding with a stoical glumness better

suited to a funeral. To-day, as soon as Axel began to take an impish delight in chaffing him on the subject of Sophie, he looked a little haughty and changed the subject.

He began to talk about Freemasonry, and the mysterious 'Scottish secret' of which old King Charles was supposed to be the last surviving recipient. "Perhaps you have heard something of it," he suggested, "in your preliminary interview, before we came. I understand that His Majesty King Gustav sets great store by this opportunity to rediscover it."

Axel would have made short shrift of Freemasonry but for the fact that Gustav seemed to be listening, with one, at least, of his two sharp ears. King Gustav was a mass of contradictions, and one could never be sure what things were serious to him; but, like many men who have never discovered the meaning of the word 'Religion', he was superstitious to the point of gullibility.

He was still talking, still listening with the other ear, to the old man who had forgotten so many secrets. King Charles had shrunk down in his high-backed chair, gripping its arms with feeble fingers. There was a glassy look in his eyes, and his voice seemed to be failing him. "Kind . . ." he murmured. "Very kind. . . . So few young men nowadays . . ." And then after a long pause: "Alone. Better alone."

King Gustav was not long in giving the signal for departure. His host tried to rouse himself, as if for a royal leave-taking. But he could do little more than nod and smile at his guests. Only when Fersen approached to make his bow, a little spark of life seemed to come back into his face.

"You remind me," he said, "of a young man who paid me a visit yesterday—or was it this morning? My memory nowadays . . . But he told me that his name was—I've forgotten exactly what his name was, but he said that in his own language it meant 'a shoulder'."

King Charles seemed to think for a moment, grasping the arms of his chair. When he spoke again, it was in little more than a whisper.

"Something to lean on," he said.

IV

"I WANT HIM! I WANT HIM! I WANT HIM!"

Mademoiselle Necker was bouncing up and down upon the sofa and almost shouting at her embarrassed father. Mademoiselle Necker had been famous in Paris, from early youth, as an Infant Prodigy who could argue with learned *abbés* and cap Court wits. Paris did not yet know (since it only saw her being intellectual at her mother's *salons*) that her passions were now developing at the same alarming pace as her brain. "I want him!" she shouted again, and then suddenly buried her little round, frog-face in the cushions.

M. Necker, late partner in the banking firm of Thelusson and Necker, paced up and down the room in growing discomfort. He had once been Finance Minister for His Most Catholic Majesty of France: he was preparing to tackle the responsibility again (with all the added and inextricable complications that foreshadow national bankruptcy) with far more self-confidence than he felt about tackling his daughter. "Really——!" he began. "Really, Germaine——!" but could think of no way to continue. "He should be here in a few minutes," he said, "and if I can find an opportunity——"

"You must make one, Papa!" Germaine's face emerged from the cushions. "You must make an opportunity. Have you answered his father's letter?"

"Naturally I have. Naturally," answered M. Necker. "I am in no way anxious about that aspect of the affair. Count Fredrik is an affectionate parent, and since we have so much to offer——"

"I believe he's an old stick! I believe he looks down his nose at us because you weren't born with a silly title round your neck. As if it weren't far more important to be a genius!"

M. Necker sat down, already feeling more at home. In a moment he was smiling, a half-deferential smile that illuminated his large sleek face with its enormous, almost clown-like eyebrows.

There had been a time when he had tried to restrain his wife and daughter from calling him, to his face, the greatest man of his age. He had long since abandoned the attempt and decided to enjoy the odour of their incense. Sometimes (as now) he felt it more becoming to change the subject, but generally in the hope that they would change it back again.

"It sounds to me," he said, "as though you were in a great hurry to leave your poor parents for a handsome foreigner."

"No, no, no!" Germaine threw herself on the floor and began, kitten-like, to rub her head against his silk-clad knees. "I want to stay near you always. I shall make Axel live in Paris, and we'll be coming round every day." She lifted her large eyes and button nose towards her father. "Axel's the best listener in the world," she said, "and no one could ever tire of listening to you. And when you are in office again, you'll be able to help him in his career, and we can all work together to save France. Axel says he is half a Frenchman already—I suppose the Queen made him that—and, anyway, what do countries matter, so long as one has the right ideas?"

"But—but, my dear child!" said M. Necker, rolling round eyes in astonishment, "what on earth do you mean about the Queen?"

"Papa, dear, did you imagine I hadn't heard that she has had her talons into him again? Why, it's been all over Paris ever since he came back from Italy. I heard a woman in the market the other day saying that——"

"Germaine! Please!" M. Necker disentangled his legs and rose in august discomfort. "At your age, you should not be repeating, or even listening to—what women say in the market."

"I'm sorry, Papa." Germaine squatted back on her heels, an unconvincing penitent. "All the same," she said, "when I get him away from that Austrian hussy——"

"Germaine! Will you please be quiet?" M. Necker was positively angry. "She is not an Austrian, to begin with, except by origin. She is less a foreigner than we are in France. She came here when she was fifteen. When I was at Court I noticed that she speaks French with no trace of an accent."

"And writes with no trace of grammar," answered Germaine

spitefully. "I've seen one of her letters, with every other word mis-spelt. It makes me wild to think that an uneducated flirt like her could attract Axel away from Mamma's *salons* to her precious Trianon and . . ."

"Germaine, have you taken leave of your senses?" The bewildered banker adopted his most majestic tone. He was sufficiently *bon bourgeois* to be shocked by the mere suggestion of a rivalry between his domestic world and that other one into whose fringes his ministerial duties had once taken him. He had had flatterers there, high-born ladies and gentlemen who looked on him as a kind of magician sent to save them and France from the consequences of their own folly and extravagance. He had received a kind of grudging favour from the Queen, though it suited Rumour to say she had been responsible for his dismissal: he certainly hoped that she would one day court popularity by reinstating him in office. But no amount of flattery or favour or hope, no amount even of money (he was reputed to have amassed three millions of income) could put him quite at ease with Queens or ladies and gentlemen. He was certainly horrified at the thought of his daughter, with her ridiculous notions of feminine rivalry, making herself a laughing-stock in their glittering and sophisticated world.

"I forbid you," he said, with all the severity he could command, "ever to couple the Queen's name with that of Count Fersen. He is a young man of honour, and if there were any truth in the silly slander you refer to, he would not be coming here to discuss proposals of marriage."

"He hasn't been here for weeks," objected Germaine with a pout. "I believe he's been dancing attendance at Versailles and forgetting all about us."

"Well, he's coming this evening. I asked him here early, before the other guests, in order to have a talk with him on this business. I am sure he would not come if he . . . if we . . . if there were any question of another attachment."

Germaine was silent a moment, and then looked at her father with a comical gravity. "Papa," she said, "I know you are a great man and a genius. But I am afraid, in some things, you're too good and innocent for this world. You know nothing about Axel—and nothing whatever about women."

"Germaine!" stammered the banker-philosopher, "Germaine, this is perfectly preposterous! I forbid you to . . . I will not have my daughter saying—that is, I . . . I shall go to my study!" And he strode to the door, recovering what dignity he could.

He almost lost it again before he could reach the passage. The door flew open in his face. One of his Swiss maids hesitated on the threshold. And behind her stood two of the ugliest men M. Necker had ever seen.

The foremost of them he had often met before, though recently with reluctance and an increasing irritation: young Erik of Staël-Holstein was attached to the Swedish Embassy and had been one of Germaine's many suitors, until M. Necker discovered certain facts about his financial position. In any case one's eye did not rest long on his ungainliness, on the thick lips and simpering eyes, whose effect was softened by the neatness and elegance of his clothes. One looked past and through him at the more redoubtable creature beyond, whose creased and snuff-soiled garments, with their huge tarnished buttons, did nothing to soften the shock that his face inflicted on those who saw it for the first time. Here was a hideousness that fascinated while it repelled, a majesty like that of a disfigured and pock-marked lion. M. Necker stood and stared at the vast head, at the truculent face thrust out between its soiled neckcloth and its mane of untidy hair: he seemed to be wondering just how such an apparition could have found entrance into his orderly household.

Young Erik felt the need of an explanation. "My—er—friend here—excuse me if I do not mention his name—" he began, "has asked me to bring him on business, which, he assures me, will be to your mutual advantage." He advanced a trifle nervously into the room: the name he was suppressing had already acquired notoriety among the scandalmongers of Paris, and he felt some hesitation in introducing its owner to M. Necker. "If you would be so good—" he began.

"Madame Necker is receiving to-night," said Necker stiffly. "Her *salon* is—"

"At eight o'clock!" interrupted the stranger, in a deep and arresting voice. "And my business need not take more than

ten minutes. You said just now you were going to your study. I will accompany you there, and we can finish before your wife's guests arrive."

He had taken his eyes off the disconcerted Necker, and was staring past him at his daughter, almost as if he were appraising her as a possible object of seduction, though hardly worth his pains. Her father did not notice the expression, but he too glanced nervously towards Germaine, wondering, perhaps, how much more of their conversation had been overheard in the passage. "You have not told me your name," he said, "nor the nature of your business. I must really decline——"

"It's about Money!" The lion's mangy jaws snapped abruptly. "That Water Company you control. Is this the way to your study?"

"Control?" echoed Necker, slightly querulous at this attempt to browbeat Genius in its own home. "I do not control any Water Company. I happen to possess a certain number of shares——"

"Quite enough to give you the running of it!" The deep voice was no less domineering. "Unless you're cleverer than I think, and have been selling out already. If you haven't, I may as well tell you I can make your holding worthless by this time next year."

"You can?" protested the financier. "Perhaps you'll be so good as to explain——"

"I never talk Money with women about," answered the stranger. "I've found it's a mistake. So if your servant here will show me the way to your study——"

He stepped back a pace. With one glance he drove the frightened maid before him and with another quashed any attempt that young Staël-Holstein might make to follow. Monsieur Necker needed no glance to spur him. He was always willing to talk Money, sufficiently sure of himself on that *terrain* to anticipate victory, and revenge for the brutal rudeness of his adversary. Donning his loftiest smile, he minced down the passage to the field of battle.

Young Erik was not sorry to find himself alone with Germaine; he was only annoyed to see that her back was turned on him, her eyes glued to the empty fireplace.

He eyed the curves of her shoulders with some relish. His gaze wandered, even more attracted, over the simple but costly furniture, the fashionable ornaments of her father's drawing-room: Monsieur Necker might be a Puritan, but his home reflected his income. Erik cleared his throat, and wondered how he was going to begin.

"You were not invited to come early!" said Germaine suddenly, without turning to him.

"No," he said, plucking up courage, "but it is always a pleasure to surprise you alone."

"You certainly surprised me," said Germaine, still presenting him with her back. "You and your friend."

"I am afraid the Marquis is a trifle abrupt," began the young man. "He's from the South, you know. These Provençal families are so sure of themselves that they seem to forget that there are such things as good manners."

"Did you say he was a Marquis?" Germaine turned round as she spoke: her face suggested that abruptness need not necessarily be a vice—in some men.

"Rather a seedy one, as you see," said her suitor hastily. "Married beneath him, of course. And . . . well . . . not married to a dozen others, of no class at all." He paused, but was disappointed to see that the light of interest had in no way faded from Germaine's eyes. "I did not like to refuse him," he continued, "but I'm afraid he's only come to try and borrow money. The poor fellow is absolutely strangled with debts." He sighed. Even in his own ears his slightly patronising tone was ringing a little hollow. Then he sighed again, remembering his own debts. They were small enough compared with the mountainous burden that lay on the Marquis's broad shoulders. But he saw no way out of them except through a rich marriage.

"I hope Father will lend it him," said Germaine. "It's time someone bought him a new suit of clothes . . . And with smaller buttons."

She seemed to muse for a moment, and then dismiss the stranger from her thoughts, turning them to some more familiar theme. Young Erik reflected ruefully that he himself was a trifle too familiar a theme, especially when one con-

sidered what familiarity is proverbially said to breed. He must find some way of destroying the romantic aura with which she had no doubt invested Axel; Axel was a fool to let a possible rival guess the secret of his courtship, and give him a chance of laying plans to upset it. All the same, thought Erik, I'll be damned if I'll go soldiering round the world in the hope of getting this young miss to think *me* romantic.

He decided to open with a gambit that seldom failed. "Your father is a remarkable man," he began hopefully, "and I'm sorry I bothered him with the Marquis. You're a remarkable family altogether, the kind of family that anyone would be proud to enter. I used to hope——"

"That's all over now!" Germaine snapped back at him, and Staël-Holstein pretended not to hear.

"I know I'm a poor man at present," he said, "and you have half Europe at your feet. But I was talking to King Gustav last night about our Ambassador Creutz retiring soon, and he was kind enough to say——" Erik decided to exaggerate King Gustav's kindness—"that there was a good chance of my succeeding him. Our most important Embassy—and very well paid, of course——"

Germaine snorted. "How like you," she said, "to think that it's a matter of money! You don't know how little money counts with us. One must have it, of course; but we never speak of it as influencing people's actions. I've always despised men who do that!"

He took the snub meekly, and rose to walk up and down the room, stroking his gay waistcoat with a podgy white hand. His eyes were fixed on Germaine: he was beginning to wonder (in case Axel were, after all, to slip from her confident grasp) whether she might not like to find consolation in the shape of a husband she could despise.

Erik did not speak for a moment, for he had a complicated hand to play. Even if he found some way of influencing Germaine, it was useless for him to approach her father (with his own dwindling income and that damnable complication of debts) unless he could be sure of the succession to the Embassy. It was equally useless to talk to King Gustav again about the Embassy, unless he could so far overreach Axel as to announce

his betrothal to Monsieur Necker's daughter—and Monsieur Necker's millions. But there was just a chance of success for a skilful double game—a little adroit flattery to his prospective wife and father-in-law, a few harmless lies to his king. It was certainly worth trying. He had nothing to lose, except the certainty of bankruptcy; and bankruptcy would mean the loss of his diplomatic post, banishment from Paris and its pleasures to some God-forgotten town of provincial Sweden.

There were voices on the stairs. Germaine, quick to recognise one of them as Axel's, threw herself into an attitude which she imagined picturesque. She raised a pensive hand into the air and fixed her gaze on her father's expressive chandelier. A hasty little kick at the folds of her skirt, and she was ready for the door to open.

It did not open for some time. Fersen was pausing in the passage; the maid who conducted him had stopped to listen to the most unusual sounds that were echoing through the house. The study door was ajar, and Monsieur Necker's petulant tones were heard against a background of angry growls from his visitor. "You can write what you like," the banker was saying. "The Company's position is too secure to be affected by pamphlets and newspaper articles. In any case, neither I nor my colleagues are going to give way to what is nothing more nor less than blackmail from a scribbler of whom no one has ever heard. If——"

The growl rose to a roar, the study door flew wide. The unkempt Marquis with the huge head stumped out into the passage.

"You *have* heard of me," he said in a voice of thunder. "The whole world will hear of me one day. And the whole world will laugh at the fools who thought it a light matter to make an enemy of Mirabeau!"

He swung past Fersen and was gone down the passage.

Monsieur Necker stood smiling—a lofty but not very convincing smile. The atmosphere suggested that something more than egoism, something more than seedy aristocracy, had passed away along the passage. The banker shrugged his

shoulders and remembered that he had an appointment to talk with Fersen—again, largely about Money.

“Will you come this way, Monsieur Fersen?” he asked, beckoning his prospective son-in-law into his study.

One cannot sit looking at a chandelier for ever, and Germaine’s neck was already getting stiff. Erik watched her with a malicious pleasure, though her embarrassment was only too likely to break in a storm upon his own head. They sat so for several minutes, Germaine enduring considerable pain rather than admit, by the slightest movement, that there was anything unusual in the posture she had adopted. She was saved by the entrance of her mother, who glanced at her, concluded that the dear child was wrapt in some speculation which might prove of importance to Mankind, and turned to give young Staël-Holstein a somewhat chilly reception. Germaine untwisted her neck, darted him a glance of contemptuous hatred and slipped out of the room.

Madame Necker had often been encouraged to think of herself as a Roman Matron. She was certainly matronly, and might have looked Roman but for the indelible stamp of Swiss *Hausfrau* on her handsome but comfortable features. She disliked young Erik for being there while her mind was occupied with preparations for her *soirée*.

They were soon completed, in good time for the return of Germaine, in careful *négligé*, and for the arrival of her guests. She could preside over their tea-cups with a proper sense of her own importance. The Neckers, not merely by means of their money, had discovered how to make the world accept them at their own valuation; there was hardly a family in Paris, outside the circles of the Royal Blood, that would be ashamed to send an occasional representative to their Friday evenings. To-night—as she explained to the first arrival (a gaping Abbé who was hoping that he would be asked to read some of the elegant love-lyrics he had brought in his pocket)—to-night she was expecting the Great Man, the catch for whom all the *salons* were angling this season.

“‘Hero of Two Worlds,’ they call him” (Madame Necker

filled the Abbé's cup as she spoke), "and I'm sure this old world here needs heroes as badly as America. My husband says that Monsieur De La Fayette——"

Her husband's dictum on the champion of Liberty was lost among the bustle of new arrivals, men of science and literary ladies who came to speak patronisingly to Germaine in the vain hope that they could stop her speaking patronisingly to them. Everyone began talking about the balloon that had been sent up at Versailles in honour of the King of Sweden's visit. King Louis, it was said, had been afraid that the monster could not be launched in air without someone getting hurt, and he had sent a written order, at the last minute, cancelling the arrangement. A previous attempt had been made with a sheep, a pig and a cat in the basket of the machine, and the menagerie had survived the experiment: King Louis rightly considered that human life was not to be risked with the same lightheartedness. He had been thwarted, nevertheless. The aeronauts had managed to cut their ropes without reading the royal mandate, and had sailed in triumph over the palace of their over-anxious monarch. King Gustav had expressed his keen delight in the spectacle, and only a few ladies had fainted.

"It may have been done in his honour," said Germaine tartly, "but I hear that the Queen had her own name painted in huge letters on the balloon."

"The Queen is—the Queen," said a young nobody in a green coat, hoping that the epigram would soon be quoted with admiration. But the company let it pass unapplauded, and turned its attention to more congenial topics.

When the door opened again and La Fayette dawned upon them, they were hard at work reforming and regenerating France; his entry redoubled their ardour. Their host, returning nettled from his study and his vain attempts to make Fersen make up his mind to clinch an immediate bargain, was not comforted by the discovery that someone else was already dazzling and lording it over his drawing-room. The constant coupling of the words 'Freedom', 'War' and 'America' could not but irk an enthusiast for Liberty whose ventures had been limited to France, and limited to finance.

"Here comes Monsieur Fersen to bear me out," said La Fayette, with a brief nod to his host. "I was telling them, Axel, that we must look to the New World if we are to save our old one from what is coming to it."

"You'll not persuade me into alliance," answered Fersen. "I was bored in Philadelphia, and the more I stay in Paris, the less I understand why you think the Old World in so much need of saving. It seems to me a most interesting and entertaining one."

La Fayette looked disconcerted: he had grown accustomed to finding allies, or at least applause, wherever he chose to ask for them. The company took its cue and smiled indulgently at the handsome young foreigner's lack of perception.

"If the Old World is to go on interesting and entertaining you," said Monsieur Necker, "it certainly needs saving financially. Monsieur Calonne, my successor in the Treasury, seems to be pushing France towards bankruptcy even quicker than she was going of herself."

He was seconded by a chorus of complaint against the government's choice of ministers: but what was to be expected of a government which, having secured the services of the greatest genius of the age, dismissed him again before his work was half accomplished?

"We need saving," interposed the Marquis De La Fayette, in order to jerk the conversation back from the rut into which M. Necker had manoeuvred it, "from the dead weight of the Past, from aristocracy and irresponsible despotism. When the time comes, I shall be the first to discard my trumpery title and put my fortune at the disposal of the Nation."

"We need saving from the criminals and bloodsuckers of the Court . . ."

"We need saving from Feudalism . . ."

"We need saving from Austrian intrigue . . ."

"You mean English intrigue . . ."

"We need saving from the Church" (this from the literary Abbé).

"We need saving from the Army."

"We need saving from fools," thought Fersen to himself, as he dropped out of the throng to seek tea and common sense

from Madame Necker. He got one without the other: she was as eager as her guests to spend ten minutes pronouncing judgment on a civilisation that had taken ten centuries to build. She fell silent with them as her husband gravely capped their opinions.

"We need saving," he said, "from those who are chosen to govern a great country, and think they can do it without reference to a God."

Monsieur Necker's notions of God were a little *bourgeois* and Genevese, but perhaps he was not unjust in his criticism of those whom his Most Catholic Majesty was persuaded into appointing as his Ministers.

La Fayette had no great liking for religion, and was soon plunging along his own road to Liberty again. Fersen sipped his tea and thought of other things—of his indecisive interview with his host, of his father and Sophie at Blasieholm.

"I do so agree with you!" Germaine had come to stand at his elbow. "What you said about the world being interesting and—what was it?—entertaining. I sometimes tell Father that if he thought less about reforming and more about enjoying it, he'd soon see what a wonderful place the world can be."

"I'm glad you find it so," said Fersen, pleased to encounter what seemed like a breath of fresh air. "And what is it that you find so wonderful in it?"

There was a pause. Germaine looked round before speaking, as if in fear of being overheard. Then: "Love," she said quickly.

Fersen looked down at her in some surprise. He could discern no trace of calculation or affectation in her bright eyes and half-open lips. He was touched at what seemed her simplicity. Something stirred in him, making him almost ashamed of the sophistication he detected in his own heart, ashamed even of the long and extremely financial discussion he had been having with her father. Then he reminded himself that the World was the World, and that it was better for the young and unsoiled to learn about it from one who would not jeer at their innocence.

"I am hoping for the opportunity—and the privilege——"

he said awkwardly, "of discussing that subject with you in the near future."

"Not here. Of course, not here," she answered, "with all these silly people." She looked round at the company whose admiration she was generally willing to soak up.

"I don't find all of them silly," said Fersen charitably, "rather the reverse. Some of them are a good deal too clever for me to keep up with them. But I can't help wishing that they would mind their own business. I happen to know something of His Majesty the King. It is his profession to choose ministers, and I am sure he would do it more wisely if he wasn't told daily that he must listen to advice from the amateurs."

Germaine felt a little out of her depths: one did not talk politics in so common sense a fashion at Madame Necker's *salon*. But she rose to the occasion.

"I expect you are right," she said, innocence still brimming over in her large, bright eyes. "I wish you would tell Papa and the others what you think."

It seemed to Fersen another mark of her inexperience, that she should imagine the company would listen to anyone who discussed their favourite subject without an '-ism' or an '-ology' to parade. But he liked her the better for it, and his mind began to travel rapidly.

He had known for some time that he must marry, if only to please his father—if only to stop slander about himself and the Queen. It was beginning to occur to him that, whatever the original motive, marriage with Germaine might prove a more pleasurable experience than he had anticipated. He saw Staël-Holstein watching them with glum irritation: it would do that young puppy no harm to be thwarted. La Fayette was still declaiming about Liberty and a non-existent Constitution with that clarion note of sincerity that proclaimed his utter ignorance of those who thought other than himself. M. Necker stood with pursed lips and an air of knowing a little better, overshadowed in his own home by enthusiasm, aristocracy, and an inherited income almost equal to the one he had more sordidly acquired. It seemed to Fersen a shame that a girl like Germaine should grow up in this hothouse atmosphere of contending theories and contending vanities. It

would be a pleasure to lead her down from such heights of unreality and make a woman of this budding bluestocking. Hans Axel von Fersen, not for the first or last time in his life, was feeling chivalrous about the opposite sex.

La Fayette had experience of guerilla warfare. His minor victory achieved and recognised, he was soon decamping to another field. Madame Necker was a trifle over-emphatic in her thanks to him for having come at all, and her husband had some difficulty in reasserting his sway over their guests after his rival's triumphant retreat. He was almost relieved when she gave him a respite by turning to the Abbé to ask if he was going to read them some of his delightful poetry. The Abbé smirked, deprecated and began to read. Fersen listened stolidly and Germaine watched him before expressing any opinion on the churchman's amorous versifying. She decided he was bored, pronounced the verses dull, and was rewarded with a smile.

"They say Marie-Antoinette is encouraging people to write in that style," she said untruthfully, and at once realised her mistake. Fersen rose from the chair beside her and began to make remarks that seemed to lead up to a departure.

She had too much worldly wisdom to try and keep him or retrieve her error on the spot. There was time before her, and he would come again. Her main cannonade, at least, had not missed fire, and another time she could avoid the temptation to spoil its effect by desultory sniping. The "*Au revoir*, Monsieur Fersen," that she gave him was sufficient, in her own estimation, to ensure his quick return.

It had not obliterated her one error. As Fersen walked home to the Embassy with the silent Staël-Holstein, the name 'Marie-Antoinette' was still ringing in his ears. That Germaine should be a trifle jealous was understandable, even in one whom he took to be so *naïve*. But he could not yet persuade himself that there was no cause for her jealousy.

Erik of Staël-Holstein, still scenting defeat and bankruptcy, was passing from silence to savagery. "I gather that little baggage has been trying her tricks on you," he said, without

provocation. "I suppose it's no good warning you. I was nearly caught myself, not long ago."

Fersen stiffened a little, but walked on in silence. The Queen was forgotten. The Queen had a husband of her own, a good man and powerful to protect her. Others were in more need of help. The world was cruel to women, and even innocence was at the mercy of envy and disappointed malice.

Some day he might be grateful to Staël-Holstein for helping him to make up his mind. Meanwhile there was a word that needed speaking, even if it a little anticipated the march of events.

"I'll thank you not to talk in that fashion," he said. "It has been kept a secret so far, but I am hoping that Mademoiselle Necker will soon be my affianced wife."

"COUNT FERSEN," SAID THE PRINCE DE LIGNE, "may one ask if you are an honest man?"

The two of them sat waiting in Marie-Antoinette's ante-room at Trianon: the Queen had invited a few of her friends to a private supper-party.

Fersen smiled, affecting a worldliness that did not altogether become him. "Is anybody honest?" he asked. "Surely Honesty has not come into fashion since I was last in France?"

De Ligne sighed, almost in reproach. "I must ask your pardon," he said, "for trying to be serious. I imagined that you were different from most men at Court or—shall we say?—reluctant to find yourself growing like them. But I suppose I was wrong. I suppose I was wrong!"

He sat looking at his own finger-nails; his irregular, rather melancholy face, with its over-large nose, was shadowed from the candlelight by the clouds of unruly hair.

"I hope I am still different from some," answered Fersen, still smiling. "I should not care to resemble M. D'Artois, whom I gather will be here to-night—even if he is King Louis' brother. Do you know who our other fellow-guests are to be? The Queen was quite secretive about them."

"No," said De Ligne abruptly, not welcoming the change of subject. He sat on for a moment, as though giving Fersen time to take up his original challenge. Then he sighed again, rose from his gilt chair, and walked with military erectness to the door. "Shall I tell them to announce us?" he said. "The Queen will be glad you have come."

Fersen had also risen. "Is that the procedure?" he asked. "Surely we wait to be summoned."

"There is no procedure here. Did you not know that Trianon has become the escape from etiquette? If you want procedure, you had better walk back across the park to Versailles."

"I'd find everyone in bed if I did," answered Fersen. "The King was out hunting all day as usual, and he'll be snoring soundly by now. I prefer Trianon, no etiquette, and Her more wakeful Majesty."

He walked to a carved mirror on the wall and began preening his neck-tie. "Why did you not tell them to announce us straight away?" he asked.

"I was hoping for another word or two with you," answered De Ligne. "Something you mentioned on our way here . . . But of course, if you are not in the mood——" He stood toying with the ornamental door-handle, as though still loath to go.

"I did not say that." Fersen began to unwind the folds at his neck. "And if Your Highness will excuse my re-tying this damned cravat while we talk . . ."

He could see the reflection of De Ligne's face in the mirror: his wide forehead was puckered, his eyes heavy: it was certainly not the face of a man anticipating an evening of pleasure. Fersen knew that De Ligne had once been pointed at as the Queen's reigning favourite, though it was some years since he had lost that position and departed in search of other adventures, in love or war. Perhaps he was hoping to persuade Fersen, as the latest of his supplanters, to ask Marie-Antoinette for some favour that she might refuse to a past admirer. But when one glanced again, the mirror did not seem to be reflecting the picture of a man that was intending to beg something for himself.

"What exactly did you mean," asked Fersen, "by asking me if I were honest?"

"I was only wondering," answered De Ligne, "how you intended to use the opportunities that you have won for yourself."

"Opportunities?"

"It would certainly not be honest of you to deny that you have gained great influence with the Queen."

"Nor of you," said Fersen, with a touch of resentment, "to deny that you had it once. I hope you are not detaining me here to tell me that you are jealous?"

"Jealous? Good God, no! Shall we say—sympathetic?"

"I am not conscious of needing your sympathy." Fersen had re-tied his cravat, but he still stood squarely to the mirror.

"You may, one day," said De Ligne quietly, "unless you are a better man than others—than myself, for instance. But I shall hope it will not come to that, if only for her sake."

He was still clicking the door-handle, his eyes averted from the younger man. Fersen swung round on him: he had no reason to dislike the man, though one wished he would put his hair in trim, like the soldier he was, and not wear those foolish ear-rings he always affected. "Your Highness's wit is famous," said Fersen. "But I must confess to finding it a trifle obscure."

"I was paying you the compliment," said De Ligne gravely, "of trying not to be witty to-night."

Fersen looked bewildered and then decided on aggression. "Am I to conclude," he asked, "that you wish to quarrel with me?"

"Quarrel? God forbid!" It was clearly De Ligne's turn to be bewildered. "I can imagine few things that could do Her Majesty more damage than a quarrel, here at Trianon, between Count Fersen and the Prince De Ligne."

"Then I am at a loss to understand——" began Fersen. ". . . Would it not be better if you led the way in to Her Majesty, instead of standing there and playing with a door-handle?"

"It is a good thing," replied De Ligne slowly, "that it takes two to make a quarrel. But I will certainly lead the way if you wish."

Fersen took a step towards the door, and then turned to throw himself into a chair. "Did you want to talk about Her Majesty?" he asked.

"If you will permit me."

"There are too many people talking about her already. Yap, yap, yap! It grows insufferable!"

"I agree." De Ligne was still standing. "They have yapped away her popularity, her chance of happiness, her good name. It began across there, at Versailles, as soon as she jibbed at their damned etiquette and tried to bring a little life into the graveyard. Then Paris took it up; Paris is even starting fairy-

tales about your King Gustav spending so much time at Trianon this month—though Heaven knows he's safe enough, with women. And all France is in the game now. In a fortnight's time, Marseilles will hear that Marie-Antoinette has given a supper-party to a Belgian Prince she used to smile at, and a handsome young colonel from Sweden—while King Louis lies snoring a mile away. And Marseilles will enjoy drawing its own conclusions!"

"Are you suggesting that we should have refused her invitations, and deprived Marseilles of one of their few pleasures?"

"I am suggesting nothing." De Ligne walked a pace or two from the door. "I am only telling you that I still admire the Queen, and am unwilling to see her other admirers adding to the burden that all France heaps on her shoulders. I imagined that you volunteered for America in order to lighten it. You have not lightened it by coming back."

"I . . . I think you exaggerate." Fersen sat pouting like a schoolboy who knows himself found out. He could hear a bustle outside in the passage, and could not help hoping for some interruption: but if it were M. D'Artois or the other guests arriving, they would probably be shown straight in to the supper-room. "Before I went to America," he said, "especially before Her Majesty's children were born, a few rogues found it to their interest to spread stories about her——"

"They did!" De Ligne smiled grimly. "I am proud of my career, Count Fersen, and particularly proud of the fact that it has involved my fighting against Frederick of Prussia, more than once. Did you know that the Prussian Minister in Paris had had instructions to foster certain—stories, as you call them, in the interest of his country?"

"Oh, diplomacy!" Fersen made a gesture of unconvincing cynicism. "But since I returned from America, these attacks have surely dwindled? They——"

"On the contrary, they have become a campaign! Our fellow-guest to-night, M. D'Artois, was barred from the throne by the birth of her children. He and the King's other brother would be only too glad of any suggestion that the Dauphin . . . was not son to King Louis. Cousin Orléans is worse: he's mixed

up with these damned reformers and Rousseau-ites: he'd mix with anyone that might help him to discredit his cousins and lick his lips for the Queen of France!" He broke off suddenly and dived into the pocket of his pearl-grey coat. "Did you see me take something off a bench," he asked more quietly, "as we came across the Park?"

"I did. A paper, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Printed. Don't ask who pays for the printing." He held up a scrap of cheap paper, damp-marked with dew. "If I might trouble you to glance at it. I'd rather not read it aloud to you in Trianon."

He dangled it, legible, from his beringed fingers. Fersen felt a sudden reluctance to touch it. There were only four lines of verse to read. Addressed to a man one knew and respected, a man for whose wife one felt more than respect, the content of them was enough to make the whole room swim round in a red mist of anger. Fersen rose, pushing away De Ligne's hand, and walked unsteadily past him to the marble fireplace.

"You see that things progressed considerably," De Ligne was saying, "while you were away, fighting for Liberty. I am a soldier and in love with my profession. But if ever I jilt War, it will be because of the stink she generates at home. The racial stink is one of the worst. The more French the Queen tries to make herself—and she's forgotten her own language now—the more the patriotism-mongers talk about 'that foreigner', 'that Austrian woman'. Nothing gives them a better handle than the fact that she has had foreign friends like me, that she still has—you."

"But . . . I . . . I cannot understand." Fersen was hardly listening. He could hear nothing but the cadence of that filthy little rhyme, see nothing but the blotchy type, the mocking dedication to King Louis, and the four lines beneath.

'Harlot, bastard cuckold,

Which would you like to see?

Take your Queen and your son to the looking-glass,

And there you can find all three!

"I should not have thought," De Ligne was speaking again "that there was anything very difficult to understand. I do not deserve any credit for the fact that I now live in Hainault, in Belgium, and seldom visit Paris or Versailles. You are a Swede, M. Fersen. Would it be very inconvenient for you to return to Sweden with King Gustav?"

Fersen stared hard at the floor, at the glossy tips of his elegant new shoes. For a moment he pictured himself marching out, here and now, giving the lie to his joy at returning to France, and his hopes of purchasing a French regiment—contriving, whatever the cost, never to see Marie-Antoinette again. The heroic course might be the absurd one, but there were times—especially evil times, evil-speaking times—when Absurdity was Wisdom and even Duty. Common sense would return in a moment: it might be better to act immediately, defying its return—defying the regrets that would start their clamour at him before he was half-way across the moonlit Park. Axel von Fersen, standing by the empty fireplace of the ante-room at Trianon and staring at the tips of his own shoes, was within measurable distance of giving the lie to the Destiny for which he had been born.

The next moment, Common Sense had seeped back into possession: one must not spoil a life, perhaps two lives, in anger at a silly scrap of paper. He looked up at De Ligne and saw him standing in contemplation of a portrait of the Queen. He felt a sudden twinge of dislike, not merely at the ear-rings, but at the man's whole personality, salted though he was in more campaigns than Fersen might ever know. He turned from the fireplace towards the door. "Shall we go to the Queen?" he asked abruptly. "I think I heard M. D'Artois, or the unknown guest, going in some time ago."

De Ligne was still staring at the picture. "She is so young," he said quietly. "Too young to be ruined."

"Ruined? I cannot help thinking that Your Highness takes a somewhat sickly view of the whole matter."

"Possibly."

"After all, a little discretion, a little——"

"Discretion?" De Ligne raised melancholy eyebrows. "Surely you know her better than to talk of discretion among

the possibilities? Unless——” De Ligne paused, as if a new thought had struck him. “Unless,” he said slowly, “her children, her growing danger . . . and some new friend.” He looked at Fersen with a genuine hope. “Sometimes she seems the most ordinary of women, and as slow to learn as others. But we are her admirers. We cannot believe her quite ordinary. One never knows what the future may hold in store.”

“And this new friend,” asked Fersen, with a twinkle that masked his gravity, “—is he to run away to Sweden?”

“I said that I hoped you were not like the others. Perhaps it is too late for anyone to run away—except those who want to save their own skins! The others will do that, all right. Versailles is rotten to the core, holding out its hands and joking with the enemy that comes to destroy it. And the best joke of all is to put a woman in the front rank, beat a quick retreat, and leave her to face the music—yes, and take as much of her baggage with them as they can steal! You’ll see! That little monkey that’s supping with her to-night, her brother-in-law Artois, he’ll be the first to take to his heels. Oh, what’s the good of talking?”

“Some of us might stay and defend her. We’re not all . . . Princes of the Blood.”

“If only her husband could defend her! If he could even keep his own brothers in order! But he is so anxious to do the right thing for everybody, the fair thing, that he’ll offer his own throat and hers to the knife—for fear of seeming prejudiced against assassins! . . . Come on. Let’s go in to supper—while there’s still supper to be had at Trianon.”

“WHATEVER ARE YOU TWO DOING?” The door had burst open in De Ligne’s face, and Marie-Antoinette stood laughing on the threshold. Not that she stood long; in a moment she was stepping, dancing almost, into the middle of the room, with grace and liveliness in every muscle. Here was an answer, more than sufficient for the moment, to all De Ligne’s croakings of disaster. Fersen felt as if the candles were blazing with a new splendour, the air charged with some heavenly music. “I won’t have it!” she cried, with smiling

petulance. "I won't have these long faces at Trianon! And please stop bowing, both of you! This is Liberty Hall, and nobody is allowed to have any manners." She pirouetted round, darting a glance towards the mirror. "Count Fersen looks almost handsome," she said, "when he blushes like that. I hope he's not going to tell me that he's been quarrelling with my old friend De Ligne! What *have* you been doing? My brother-in-law says he's starving, and my other guest came half an hour ago." She ran back to the open door: flutterings and gigglings in the passage suggested that M. D'Artois was whispering to the Queen's ladies. "Come in, Charles!" she called, "and bring the ghost with you!"

D'Artois scampered into the room. He was as different from King Louis, his brother, as chalk from cheese—ribald, diminutive, and mischievous. He was pulling at a long silk cord; on the end of it came his fellow-guest, over whom someone had thrown a table-cloth that hid everything except wrinkled silk stockings and shoes with high red heels. "I'll bet you a thousand," shouted D'Artois, "no, two thousand, that you'll never guess who it is!"

The ghost mooded and began to dance a slow jig, straining at the silk cord that bound his hidden wrist. The Queen's ladies were giggling in the doorway, Mme De Polignac wholeheartedly, her rival De Lamballe trying not to look a little shocked. D'Artois, feeling that his posturing captive was gaining the centre of the stage, tried to recover it by over-acting the part of bear-leader, tugging at the cord and inviting the audience to be quick with their guesses.

"What happens if we guess wrong?" shouted Fersen above the tumult.

"You pay the forfeit—kiss Mme Lamballe!" answered D'Artois. "Wo-up, Bruin!"

"I guess the Pope!" cried De Ligne, suddenly merry as a young subaltern. "I want to pay that forfeit." He advanced towards the Princess, who screamed like a nervous school-girl and hid behind the Queen.

"Further north!" said D'Artois. "Can't you see it's white—a polar bear?" Then he suddenly saw that Fersen was about to guess right and win the bet. He twitched

away the table-cloth and revealed King Gustav, solemnly dancing.

Gustav began laughing as he stopped to untie his wrist, and only pulled a wry face for a moment at the sight of Fersen. "You didn't tell me that Axel was to be here," he said. "Axel will tell his Papa, and I shall have a scolding when I get home, for compromising the dignity of Sweden. They never play bears at Blasieholm—do they, Pejron?"

Pejron had appeared in the doorway, smiling his sulky, handsome smile.

"Your Majesty can rely on my silence," said Fersen with mock solemnity. "I have just been listening to a lecture from De Ligne here on the subject of Discretion."

He saw De Ligne wince, and a sudden shadow pass over the Queen's face.

"'Highness', please, not 'Majesty'," said Gustav, tugging petulantly at the knotted silk. "I'm still Count of Haga here."

"Time the animals were fed!" cried D'Artois, determined to recapture attention, and began to pommel Pejron out of the doorway.

The Queen had recovered all her gaiety. "Who's going to lead me to the trough?" she said.

De Ligne held back, but the others started forward. Fersen was quickest, and was annoyed to see Marie-Antoinette turn from him to take King Gustav's arm with a gracious, "Your Highness!"

"You said this was Liberty Hall," he protested. "No precedence for Highnesses!"

"Not precedence—preference," said the Queen, over her shoulder. "Love and Liberty go together."

She led the way out. D'Artois contributed some whispered indecency about Pejron being Gustav's preference in Love. Fersen followed the ill-assorted company, wondering whether he had done something to offend the Queen.

He was still puzzled when supper was three parts done. If she meant to make him jealous, Gustav was a strange accomplice to choose; and as to tolerating D'Artois' impudences,

laughing at them, even over the soup and the chicken, everyone knew that that was mere bravado. She had once tolerated her cousin D'Orléans in just such a fashion, finding him amusing until she began to find him disgusting. D'Artois was negligible; he was indeed more monkey than man, with his squashed nose and beady eyes: Fersen remembered that, when first he was in France, D'Artois was taking lessons in tight-rope-dancing—anything to make the Queen laugh and his old aunts purse staid lips. In those days Gustav had been her *bête noire*. Gustav had paid a visit to Versailles, flattered old ladies and blue-stockings, and brought his embroidery-frame to work at while he talked to them. Marie-Antoinette generally liked a man to be a man.

Gustav was enjoying her strange preference now, paying her compliments with his mouth full of salad, admiring her taste in re-decorating the supper-room—"So simple and yet so pleasing! I must have your style copied for my suite at Gripsholm."

"Great changes since you were last at Trianon," said D'Artois, with obvious malice. "Her Majesty's decorators have been busy blotting out the Past."

He succeeded in embarrassing everybody. When Gustav was last at Trianon, it had belonged to the Dubarry, the dead king's mistress: he had had to pay court to her, seeking French help and money to become master of his own kingdom: he had given her lap-dog a diamond-studded collar (perhaps here, in this very supper-room), and Marie-Antoinette, still only Dauphiness and at odds with the Dubarry, had heard of, and hated him for the gift. No one but D'Artois would have had the bad taste to remind them of that humiliating past.

Madame De Polignac came to the rescue. "Have you noticed the furniture?" she asked King Gustav. "Her Majesty's monogram on every chair-back?" She twisted aside to show the carved 'M.A.' against which she had been leaning, and began an anecdote to illustrate the Queen's good taste. As she told it, her eyes wandered towards the Princess De Lamballe, who sat blushing to find that her rival had stolen another march upon her.

"My main object in the decorations," said the Queen, "was

to make Trianon as different as possible from Versailles." She sipped her iced water and looked round to see if her guests had enough of the wine that she never tasted herself.

"Your Majesty has my sympathy in hating Versailles," began De Ligne. "I think——"

"It isn't that," said the Queen quickly. "It's just that I want variety. I can't live without change." Her eyes rested for a moment on Fersen, as though begging him to suspend judgment on what she was forced to say in company. "Change, change, change!" she said, more defiantly. "Boredom's the only enemy that matters."

"Your Majesty," said Gustav gaily, "has discovered the secret of life. We can only defeat it if we shift our point of attack every moment; as soon as we stand still, it's bound to beat us. May I have some of that delightful-looking *pâté*—your own recipe, I take it? I'm sure it's delicious."

'The King with Two Faces'—one could see very clearly how he had come by that nickname. The curious flattening on one side of his forehead made one profile quite different from the other. The side turned away from Marie-Antoinette, the side Fersen sat watching, had more melancholy in it, and more calculation—a cunning that no gaiety could quite disguise. No doubt he had kept it turned away from his former hostess at Trianon, stroking her lap-dog. No doubt he had his own reasons for keeping it away from Marie-Antoinette while he flattered her. For all Fersen knew, he might be contemplating a second Royal Revolution—to strip the Swedish Parliament of such powers as he had left it at the first. One could only guess why he was in France at all: but it was a likely guess that he was regretting having resisted the temptation to establish an absolute despotism, since, without it, he had failed occasionally to have his way with Sweden. If the cat was jumping that way, one knew why he had come to King Louis' Court, why he was praising the Queen's decorations, her supper and her self. Fersen, watching the other side of his face, wondered whether he would be committing a folly or committing a treason if he wrote home to his father, and told him to marshal the Swedish House of Peers against another Royalist plot.

"Axel's looking as if Life had beaten him already," said King Gustav suddenly. "Have you been standing still, Axel—or trying to live in the Past?" There was no hint of menace in the King's eye, and before Fersen could answer, he had changed the subject. "I am sorry about Creutz retiring," he said, turning back to Marie-Antoinette. "I hope Your Majesty will guide me in my task of choosing an ambassador to succeed him in Paris."

"We're all in despair about it," answered Marie-Antoinette. "Some of my parties will be ruined without your M. Creutz—unless you find someone as interesting in his place." Her eyes seemed to rest on Axel for a moment, but warily. She had suffered too much already from her headlong efforts to do a kindness to a friend.

"Is it true," asked D'Artois, "that you were thinking of that young scamp, De Staël—What-do-you-call-it? A little bird told me he had hopes."

There was a momentary pause. Pejron was seen to raise his eyebrows and mutter a sarcastic "Hopes!" King Gustav said nothing, ignoring D'Artois.

"You're drinking nothing, Count Fersen," said Marie-Antoinette. "Empty that glass and let them fill it up."

"Mine's empty already," said Gustav with a trace of pique. He beckoned to the advancing servant whom Fersen was already waving back. "'No need of Wine where Beauty rules the board,'" quoted Fersen, looking towards the Queen. He felt that his turn had now come to pay her compliments.

"I thought," said King Gustav maliciously, "that you had decided to prefer Intellect. If all this talk of your marrying is true, you'll have to stop courting Beauty."

The Queen looked momentarily puzzled and then seemed to understand. She darted Gustav a look of hostility.

D'Artois did not see it. "Doesn't follow at all!" he said with alcoholic boisterousness. "I haven't slept with my wife for years."

The whole company saw Marie-Antoinette give a slight shudder, but they waited in vain for her reproof. No one ever knew why D'Artois had licence to say such things at Trianon.

"If I might ask Your Majesty again," said De Ligne tactfully, "about the question of the Embassy, our friend Axel here——"

"You mightn't!" D'Artois shouted him down. "Who the Devil wants to talk more politics?"

"I hope no one does," said King Gustav. "I travel abroad to escape politics and enjoy myself." He turned politely to the Queen. "I wish we could persuade Your Majesty to join our party for Thursday's masked ball in Paris. Axel's coming, and——"

D'Artois, muttering vinously, suddenly broke into full cry. "Only a fool," he said, "would travel to France to escape politics. We breed politics here, faster than rabbits! My royal brother's sensible—hunts all day to get away from his ministers, even from Calonne. Calonne's a gentleman, anyway, not like that Necker creature we had to be polite to when he was in office. The old Swiss sow used to ooze politics at you, every time you came near him!" He had risen from his seat and began to march up and down the room with a tolerable imitation of the great Necker's strut. "'My dear wife,'" he parodied, 'keeps open house for coffee and philosophy every Friday. My dear daughter makes eyes at the philosophers and——' Good God, isn't it Friday to-night? They're probably at it now, unless they're all tucked up in their little Protestant beds!"

"Sit down, Charles!" ordered Marie-Antoinette, but the excitement was getting beyond her control.

"I am Necker addressing a States-General," shouted D'Artois, jumping on a chair. "That was his idea—to call a States-General, a damned, moth-eaten Parliament, after God knows how many centuries, just so's it could listen to M. Necker's speeches. Let's have one here! Stand back, everyone! I'm going to pull the handle and get rid of the table!"

"No, no! We never use that now. I'll tell them to clear." Marie-Antoinette rose to impose order on her brother-in-law. But he had already reached the wall and was snatching at a little lever beside one of the pictures. The ladies screamed with excitement: the floor was suddenly parting, its centre portion sinking earthwards with the fully-laden table. It was so that

the dead King Louis had had it cleared or charged with new courses when he wanted no servants by him, to see in what posture he supped with the Dubarry.

A servant dashed out and the others followed him, seeking the cellarage. Fersen snatched his chair back, as it swayed on three legs over the lip of the chasm. But D'Artois gave his a vicious kick which sent it slithering forward to crash down upon the porcelain and crystal.

"'Retrenchment, Economy, Reform!'" he declaimed, more Neckeresque than ever. "My Lords, my Lords of the Church, gentlemen of the Commons! The principles formulated at Geneva and perfected by Me—— Sit down, Ladies: you're the House of Peers. Gustav and Pejron, the Clergy—vowed to renounce Woman. And if Axel and De Ligne are going to pull such long faces, they'll have to be the Commons, the God-damned *Tiers État!*"

D'Artois cackled at his own wit and then resumed oratory to his triple Parliament. "My Lords," he said, "My Hypocrites of the Church. My lawyers and other rascals! On the brink of the abyss which now yawns before us——"

"Stop this! Stop this at once!" The Queen was furious now. Ancestral fires seemed to shrivel up her frivolity and forbearance, and D'Artois could not face Maria Theresa's daughter. "You seem to forget in whose house you are guest," she said, as he slunk to the wall and jerked the lever up again. There was a sound of creaking and splintering wood, but nothing more: the long-idle mechanism could not close the breach it had so swiftly made.

King Gustav was sobered now, and De Ligne glared at D'Artois with undisguised contempt. Marie-Antoinette stood tapping her foot on the parquet, as if doubtful how to use her newly-regained authority. The others stood round the walls, wondering what would happen next—wondering whether they had not better take their leave unbidden.

What happened next was a clumsy knock on the door. The servants had left it ajar: there was a noise of shuffling, followed by an uncomfortable silence. Then the Queen said:

"Come in," through pursed lips, and King Louis blinked his way into the many-candled room.

He seemed confused and uncertain of his reception. His heavy features, impressive enough in repose, became almost pathetic in such moments of indecision. "I am sorry to disturb——" he began, "but the servants seem——" He peered round the room. "I see you have people here," he said apologetically, and then, with the first touch of resentment: "Isn't it rather late for people?"

He was advancing into the room. Fersen stepped forward and grasped his elbow, holding him back from the gaping hole.

"M. D'Artois, Your Majesty," he said, "has been showing us the old trap-door. But I am afraid the machinery is out of order."

"Oh, is Charles here?" said the King. ". . . Oh, there you are, Charles. Rather late, you know." He still ignored Fersen, and turned from his spoilt brother to his wife. "Time for bed," he said. "I was going to bed long ago, but M. Calonne brought me something urgent to read, something about the finances. M. Calonne understands everything about——"

"We were just going to bed ourselves," said the Queen, biting her lip. Trianon was supposed to be sacred, even from her husband; but it was hardly his fault to-night if he had entered unannounced.

The leave-takings were brief and formal. De Ligne took D'Artois by the arm, and hurried him out into the night. Gustav, dismissing Pejron to wait for him in the courtyard, took King Louis aside to whisper explanations and smooth things over with some kindly half-truth.

Fersen had no opportunity to express his sympathy to the Queen for her ruined, her slightly humiliating evening. He hoped there was no need; if her brow was still clouded as he approached to make his bow, he told himself that to-morrow's distractions would restore her to herself. Gaiety could never fail her, such gaiety as had lightened the whole ante-room when she had first broken in on him and De Ligne. The world had need of happiness, and he was glad to be bowing before its shrine.

He stood upright, encountered her eyes and caught her swiftly-whispered "Axell" Only then did he see her as she was—the unhappiest woman in a land shadowed by multiplying sorrows.

THERE WAS A FINE AUGUST night outside, fantastic with moonlight. As they waited for King Gustav, Fersen stood looking back at the silvered elegance of Trianon, the pools of black shadow beneath the magnificent trees. Pejron stamped up and down the gravelled fore-court, cursing and stabbing at the bushes with his little stick. Wine, and the sudden shock of cool air, was bringing out the quarrelsome schoolboy from behind his handsome and sophisticated exterior. He had worked himself into a considerable rage by the time Gustav appeared, merry and talkative, to slip an arm through his and lead the way towards the chequered alleys of the Park.

"A wonderful night!" said the King, as the trees closed round them. "We are having a wonderful time in France, and this is being the most wonderful of all our wonderful nights." He had dropped his excellent French for a slightly muddled Swedish, and he was rolling out the "*Ondebär . . . ondebär*" with a wealth of poetic unction. Fersen, stretching his long legs to follow the discordant couple trotting ahead, could not help smiling at the realisation that King Gustav had taken a good deal more wine than was his custom.

"I hardly know what Your Majesty means by 'wonderful'," grumbled Pejron. "If Your Majesty finds that D'Artois creature interesting——"

"I find everyone and everything interesting! I try to be interesting myself. Was I interesting to-night, Axel, or was I being a bore?"

"Your Majesty is never a bore," answered Fersen, as he caught up with them. "Your worst enemies could not make such an accusation."

"Listen to that, Pejron! Compliments from long Axel!" King Gustav laughed happily. "And just after I've been doing my best to hurt his feelings at supper. I am glad I did not

succeed, Axel. I want the Queen to think well of——”

He stopped suddenly, staring up the long avenue of ancestral trees. They had all seen it—the white-cloaked figure that stood in a patch of moonlight ahead. For a second none of them could stir or speak; then Gustav dropped Pejron's arm and took a pace forward. “But it can't be *her*!” he whispered.

At the same moment the woman seemed to start and turn. She glanced toward them, and then vanished, gliding among the trees. Her resemblance to the Queen was gone as soon as she moved. Fersen, missing Marie-Antoinette's peculiar grace, wondered how he could have been even momentarily deceived. The other two were more convinced by the impossibilities of time and place. “It must have been her ghost,” said Gustav, as he walked on with a more gingerly gait. “I left her talking to her husband, poor man. What a King for France! They say he spends his time mending locks and things, when he's not out hunting.”

“The other day,” said Pejron with contempt, “he saw some masons patching up the wall of Versailles Palace. And the next thing was, he had to take off his coat, roll up his sleeves, and go out to help them. It's a scandal. Axel, why don't you tell the Queen to put a stop to it?”

“Shouldn't patch up Versailles,” said King Gustav unexpectedly. “Let it moulder. Let it drop. It'll ruin King Louis yet—just as Axel's Blasieholm would like to ruin me. Isn't that so, Axel? Only I'm not such a fool as to live there, where your father can be spying on me and slandering me all day. King Louis prefers to live with his worst enemies at Versailles! Versailles——”

He suddenly started to run, darting along a side alley with surprising swiftness. In a minute he had reached the open moonlight, was scampering round an ornamental pond and had leapt on to a seat to stare up at the Palace of Versailles.

It seemed to breathe hostility at them from its endless tiers of dead and shuttered windows. It seemed to menace Trianon and all who visited Trianon to help the Queen forget that her duty lay at Versailles—side by side with such husband as Versailles had seen fit to give her. Fersen, halting after his

brief run, looked with new eyes at the citadel of all that had vowed enmity against the woman that he loved.

King Gustav, perched above him, loved no one but himself, and was vexed by no problems but his own. "It's asleep now," he was saying, "asleep or watching. How long has it been there? How much longer does it think it can stay, when it has ruined its King?"

"Adlerbeth," said Pejron with a sneer, "could answer Your Majesty's first question from one of his guide-books. But we need a prophet for the second!"

"Palace of Versailles," Gustav began to intone, "founded by Louis the Great as a taming house for his rascally nobles. Captured by nobles still more rascally, and turned into an elegant gaol for Kings and Queens of France. Present prisoner—King Louis the Good-Natured, King Louis the Locksmith, doubling the bolts that keep him in his cell. Too good-natured to stint a single rogue of the money he's stolen or the sloth he calls his Privilege. God, it makes me sick! If that woman doesn't put some fight into him, he'll lose us all our heads. Am I talking nonsense, Axel, or am I talking sense?"

"Nonsense," put in Pejron. "And now Your Majesty is certainly becoming a bore."

"How dare you, Pejron?" answered Gustav, jumping down from the stone seat. "I'll make that High Treason if you're not careful! You should learn to be serious-minded, like Axel here. And even Axel should learn to study politics, and form opinions on them."

He sat down on the rim of the fountain and began to drop pebbles into the water.

"I never form opinions on anything," protested Axel. "I always tell people that I am only an observer—a witness. I find that phrase useful, for choking off argumentative politicians."

"Pity to repeat it too often," said Gustav, staring at the ripples he was making. "I never repeat myself. The same trick won't work twice." He picked up three more pebbles and dropped them solemnly into the water. "One. Two. Three," he said. "King. Queen. Dauphin. These are their heads falling. Did you know that Louis has a picture of King

Charles of England hung up in his study? He goggles at it every day—reading the finance reports from the charming, the elegant, the incompetent M. De Calonne. Hasn't the fool read enough history to know that Charles was ruined by listening to fairy-tales about finance: he called a Parliament, a Riksdag, to vote him money, and it cut off his head instead. Here's three more pebbles for King Louis' dear kinsmen, the three that are hoping to succeed him. D'Orléans. Provence. And that little chimpanzee D'Artois. D'Orléans can go into the water right away; he's begun playing with fire already. The other two can keep; they may contrive to live, and even get their brother's Crown—when it's all over, and Crowns aren't worth having!"

He made a grimace of contempt and tossed the two pebbles back at Fersen's feet.

"I'm glad Your Majesty isn't killing everyone," said Pejron, with clumsy sarcasm. "I was almost afraid you would send yourself to the scaffold."

Gustav looked up at him—his face white and expressionless in the moonlight. "No, he said," gravely. "We don't do it that way in Sweden. We don't have Cromwells in our Riksdag—only dear old gentlemen like Axel's father. But there are other ways. I've been warned! When I made myself into a real King, that old scoundrel in Berlin, my Uncle Frederick, was so annoyed at my success, that he wrote and told me I'd come to a bad end. Something about a pistol, and the Ides of March. No, I must have imagined the pistol. I'm tipsy. They had no pistols when Julius Cæsar was murdered. Axel, have you ever seen me tipsy before?"

"Your Majesty is not tipsy now," said Axel, offering a hand to pull him up from his squatting position. "But I think it is time we walked on and found a cab to take us back to the Embassy. One does not need to be tipsy to know that we must all die, one way or another."

Gustav rose suddenly, disdaining the proffered help. "You're right!" he said, with something like violence. "Long Axel is right, as usual! What does it matter how we die, if we've done our work first? Keep a mouldy old Church alive, like Charles I. Surprise people into having some Common Sense, as I'm doing. Or even sleep and hunt and be a good fellow, which is all King

Louis will ever do. And then, when we've done enough of it, puff goes the candle!"

"Well, mine's not going to puff yet," said Pejron. "And I agree with Axel that it's time we——"

"How do you know?" interrupted Gustav fiercely. "You may be the youngest of us three, but for all you know you'll be dead in a week, while we, Axel anyway, has thirty more years in this idiotic world. Axel——" He stopped suddenly, and turned on Fersen. "Do you by any chance know Greek?" he asked.

"Very little," answered Fersen, "but I know that the French for 'cab' is *fiacre*."

"I know none," said the King quietly, taking his arm and facing towards Versailles. "But when you said 'witness' just now, I suddenly remembered what an old German pastor once told me in a sermon. He said that the Greeks used the same word for 'witness' and for 'martyr'."

He fell silent as they made their way up the hill to the Palace. When they reached its huge deserted courtyard, and Pejron began to halloo for a conveyance, it became clear that King Gustav was contriving to hide his true self again behind the mask that Time and Royalty had forced him to fabricate.

"You will forget everything I said by the pond," he ordered. "Even if it were true, I should not wish it to be repeated."

But there was a certain lack of confidence in his new manner, and throughout the journey home he sat silently frowning over his own thoughts.

VI

"WELL, GO AND DANCE WITH HER," said King Gustav. "If you are so sure it's the Queen, go and dance with her yourself. I have other things to worry me."

A mask concealed his face, but not his anxiety: his delicate fingers picked nervously at the fastenings of his costume.

"But I cannot understand——" began Fersen. "It is hardly likely that——"

"It's generally the unlikely that happens," interrupted Gustav. "Look at me to-night—king of a great country, and chasing a young jackass round a masked ball for fear he'll kill himself the moment my back's turned."

"Who?" asked Fersen in surprise. "Is Staël-Holstein committing suicide in despair?"

"No, no! Pejron. Devil take the boy, where's he going to now?"

He darted away through the couples assembling for a fresh dance, his scarlet heels gleaming as he kicked up the long skirts of his domino. Pejron was conspicuous enough, dressed as a musketeer of the Richelieu period: Gustav soon sighted him, with his back to a wall, gazing round the room as if for some friend or sweetheart.

Gustav tapped him on the shoulder. "I told you to stay beside me," he said curtly, "I told you there was to be no nonsense to-night."

Pejron seemed hardly to have heard. "I thought he came this way," he said, "but the skunk's disappeared again—if it was him!"

"If you mean M. De la Marck, you can't be sure he's at the dance. And I have already told you I will not have you picking a quarrel with him and getting run through with a small-sword in the *Bois* to-morrow morning."

"I shouldn't mind that," said Pejron sullenly, "so long as I ran *him* through. He's been calling me coward all over Paris because I resigned my commission in the regiment just before

it went to America. Your Majesty must want his subjects to defend their honour—and the honour of their country.”

“My Majesty wants its subjects to do as they are bid,” said Gustav, taking him by the elbow. “I’ll have no affairs to spoil our time in Paris.” It was difficult to enforce a kingly authority through two masks, and cajolery seemed momentarily safer than command. “Life’s too good,” he said, “to throw away on duels. Come to the buffet and see what there is to eat.”

It was some minutes before Fersen could make up his mind to approach the silent figure that was puzzling him so much. He could not believe it was the Queen. A few years ago, it had been common enough—a trifle too common, perhaps—to see her at dances in Paris, even public subscription dances like this one; she had once scandalised everyone by arriving at one in an ordinary cab and proclaiming the fact as a good joke. But things were different since he had come back from America since she was mother to a Dauphin. She did not even dance at Court, but merely presided over its decorous prancings. And yet—his instinct was crying defiance to his reason, assuring him that it could be none but she. If she was barely recognisable, who but the Queen would have troubled to adopt so burdensome a disguise? She wore an Oriental costume that hid her hair and muffled her figure past discerning, a long mask from which fringed silk dangled over mouth and neck.

Still only half convinced, Fersen saw her turn to a lady beside her, less meticulously disguised. He recognised Madame De Lamballe. It was strange that she should bring the Princess on such an escapade as this: but it was also certain that nothing but the hope of regaining the Queen’s friendship could have brought the timid Lamballe to a public ball at the Hôtel de Ville. He moved cautiously towards them and saw that it was indeed the Queen.

“I wondered when you were coming,” she said in a low voice. “But I hoped that I was not recognisable—in spite of all your staring.”

“I’ll wager I’m the one man here that knows Your Majesty is——”

"Ssh! No 'Majesties.' I'm in danger. My dear brother-in-law, Provence, is about and he has ears like a Red Indian. He might do as you've done—see through all this." She ran a light hand over her spangled robe: the gesture was itself sufficient to suggest Marie-Antoinette to those who knew her well enough. "And they could find a use for their discovery," she said, biting her lip.

"Why did you come?" asked Fersen, looking round for enemies he might hide her from.

She did not answer that. The Princess whispered that it would rouse suspicion if she were seen talking to M. Fersen, but still she kept silence. When she did speak, it seemed that she, too, feared the imprudence.

"Dance this dance with someone else," she said, "and come to me after it. I shall be over there."

Fersen looked round for a partner, but there were no ladies near by except those who were already advancing with their partners to form the figure for the approaching *quadrille*.

"Your little Necker girl must be here," said the Queen. "Look under the clock."

Fersen looked. Under the clock, among obvious dowagers and chaperons, sat Madame Necker in a Roman *palla* which contrasted comically with the little strip of black velvet through which she was staring at the dancers.

"I believe," said Marie-Antoinette, with a trace of tartness, "that it is quite *bon ton* to dance with one's *fiancée*."

"I have no *fiancée*. Nothing is decided," he answered hastily as she swept away from him with a little laugh.

He stood cursing himself for a moment. He had not seen any of the Neckers since their *salon* a fortnight ago, and a fortnight gives time for much thought. It might be embarrassing to dance with Germaine; on the other hand it might give him a chance to decide one way or the other, and even let her know, by implication, what his decision was.

He made his way nearer to the would-be mother of imaginary Gracchi, followed the direction of her eyes and found his quarry. Germaine was standing disconsolate in a *mantilla* and Spanish skirt.

"May I——?" he said, and then heard the music strike up.

All the figures were already formed for the dance. He apologised for his lateness.

"I'd just as soon talk," said Germaine, fluttering at him through her mask. "That's the worst of quadrilles and minuets, one can't talk properly. One day, when Nature triumphs over Fashion at last, they'll invent a dance in which one can talk quietly to one's partner."

"I might agree with you," said Fersen politely, "if all partners were such interesting talkers as you."

She beamed her gratitude at him, and laughed coquettishly. Fersen tried to persuade himself that the laugh did not grate a little on him.

"I was wondering if it were you and King Gustav in the dominoes," she said. "I wasn't sure till he ran off and I saw who you went to talk with."

Fersen glanced down at her in annoyance and anxiety. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"You needn't be afraid. She needn't either. It's clever, that harem garment. Only my eyes are sharpened by what is happening in my heart."

Fersen began to tap on the ballroom floor with his toe, angry with himself and with this woman whom he might yet have to spend his life with. "You guess wrong," he said stiffly, "if I am right in guessing what you've guessed."

"I don't like lies," she answered. "Nothing can kill Love so quickly as a lie."

"You assume that Love is alive," he said. "Between whom?"

"If you will not answer that question, I certainly cannot. I can only speak for my own heart."

"It is better not to speak about hearts," he said, "until other things are settled."

He was being boorish and he knew it. He suddenly realised he was longing for the dance to end, longing for the time when he could quit Germaine and go back to discover why the Queen had come so rashly to this masquerade. It did not occur to him that his present bad behaviour might be a clue to the mystery of her coming. He did not think it conceivable that a Queen should want to put him at loggerheads with the daughter of a foreign banker.

There was silence between them, Fersen staring at the dancers, Germaine glancing up at the face which had caught her fancy, and finding only an obstinate chin thrust out beneath a mask. It had seemed impossible, a week ago, that her fancy could ever waver: now she might have to accept the impossibility, surrender him, even, to the rival she had thought to conquer.

The dance ended. Fersen stood rocklike for a minute or two, then murmured as politely as possible and went off to lose himself among the dispersing couples before making his way round to the appointed *rendez-vous*. He found Marie-Antoinette, only to be dismissed on an errand.

"Tell King Gustav," she said, "that I wish to speak to him. Tell him so that no one else knows that I am here."

His departure from Germaine's side had been watched, and not only by Germaine. Behind them, Staël-Holstein had been complimenting Madame Necker on the appropriateness of her Roman costume. Now he could glide quietly forward, and stand where his compatriot had stood a moment or two before. Germaine gave no sign of welcome—and none of hostility. He waited in hope, contented to be ready for her mood.

"I am sorry that I did not recognise your—that I did not recognise you." Gustav had found the Queen.

"And I am glad of it," she answered. "Your . . . Highness knows something of the necessity for an incognito. . . . Who is the musketeer you are so interested in?"

"No one that matters, Madame. So long as I can keep him in sight. . . . You had a message for me?"

"From my husband. Creutz is certainly retiring from your Embassy?"

"Alas, yes. We none of us grow younger, and I cannot grudge him a little peace after so many years of good service."

"We want young Staël-Holstein as ambassador."

Gustav glanced up at her quickly, wondering what made King Louis ask for so undistinguished a minister. But he had come to Paris (among other things) to borrow money from the

French Court, and would have to do as it asked in the matter of his Paris Embassy. He had not expected that its wishes would jump with the vague idea he had had himself.

"The young rascal's nearly ruined himself. The Lord knows I pay my minister here a fat salary, but it isn't enough without a private fortune."

"I thought he was going to marry one. A very large one."

"Was!" Surely you know that lately it's been——" he stopped short, suddenly guessing that the message had not come from Marie-Antoinette's husband. "I wonder if it could be arranged before I go back to Sweden," he said reflectively.

"You go soon?"

"Next month."

"With all your people—all the ones you brought from Italy?"

"Yes, unless—— If Your . . . if your husband should express a desire for me to leave anyone behind in Paris—Cederström, perhaps, or Mauritz Armfelt, or Fersen . . ."

"You'd never spare us your beloved Mauritz," she said, with a hint of malice. "But Count Fersen is to be colonel of a French Regiment."

"And he can hardly command it from Stockholm. Or could he—by balloon post?" They both laughed, a nervous little laugh. Gustav was thinking that women were curiously transparent and easy to manage: easier than men, when the manager was not tempted by women's charms. He was also thinking that it might prove convenient, in the troublous times ahead, to have two ministers in Paris; and if the second, the unavowed one, had intimate connections with Versailles (or even Trianon) it would not matter so much if the acknowledged ambassador were Staël-Holstein and a man of no great calibre.

"Erik's a young scapegrace," he said, "but you shall have him if you choose. He can marry his money, and save Fersen from a very big mistake. I'll leave you Fersen when I go."

"That will be for you and my husband to decide," she said, impassive behind her mask. "I am always scolded by the big-wigs at Versailles for interfering in French politics—just as I used to be scolded by my mother from Vienna for not taking enough interest in them."

She laughed again, more happily; a great joy was dawning on her. She wanted to dance the next dance with Axel, with King Gustav even, though she knew she must not think of it. Too many flatterers, speaking truth for once, had told her that her dancing, like all her movements, was more graceful than any woman's in France.

She could see Axel watching them from across the room, and she suddenly knew that she had no more to say to Axel's king.

"Your musketeer has made off," she said. "I thought you wanted to keep him in sight."

KING GUSTAV WAS IN A HURRY to find Pejron; but as he passed where Germaine and Erik stood talking together, he could not resist the kindly temptation to give the young man such a pat on the shoulder as might mean encouragement. Erik, his wishes fathering thoughts, interpreted it as such, and was encouraged to new boldness.

"I don't mind your despising me," he said. "I probably deserve it, at any rate by the standards you're accustomed to. We cannot all be Neckers." He was careful to suppress any hint of irony, but Germaine was accustomed, on certain topics, to any amount of exaggeration. "I have something to offer. An important position, an Embassy, the *entrée* into Court for myself and my wife, with no restraint on her activities—I'd be too busy to bother you much . . ."

"You seem very sure of the Embassy," said Germaine contemptuously. "Since when was that arranged?"

"Since to-night," said Staël-Holstein, with pardonable exaggeration. "King Gustav told me at the Ball. I meant to go to your father first, but when I saw you here, looking so lovely in that Spanish dress, I——"

Germaine silenced him with a petulant gesture. If the impossible happened and she were to take his name and accept him for a husband, there would be more need than ever to keep him in his proper and subordinate position. The name would hardly do as it stood: it was too unwieldy and too German-sounding; but it could be changed or at least shortened. She found herself thinking these things out already. It was

beginning to occur to her that, while abandoning oneself to the sweet liberty of Love and Nature, unhindered by convention, it might be convenient to have a conventional husband as a sheet-anchor. She had never since childhood doubted her mission to astonish Europe: she was beginning to wonder whether she could not best astonish it under the distinctive title of Madame de Staël.

"Have you persuaded your father to buy you the regiment?" Marie-Antoinette would have to leave soon, before midnight gave the signal for the doffing of masks: but she could still spare five minutes—to give to Axel.

"Not yet," he answered. A curious excitement was suddenly making his heart beat high, but he spoke calmly. "I may have to find the money myself," he said. "I'm determined to be a Colonel and of your Royal Swedes."

"Oh, money, money! Is it so easy to come by? M. Calonne used to say he could always find some when we needed it, but he's not been very successful lately. My Lamballe here. . . . No, I don't want Lamballe to hear this."

She moved a step or two away, out of earshot of all.

"Axel?" she said.

"Your Majesty?"

"I've told you not to call me that."

"Madame?"

"Is that the best you can do? What do you call your friends—your sister? You once told me she was your greatest friend."

"She is. I'm longing to see her again, when I get back to Sweden. And I call her Sophie."

"What a pretty name!" said the Queen, and whispered it over to herself. "Better than 'Madame'."

"Forgive me for that," he answered. "I forgot that I was at a masquerade. I forgot that I need not know I am speaking to a Queen."

"All life's a masquerade. You've not joined it yet, Axel, and perhaps you never will." She sighed a moment. "They made me take my part so young," she said. "I was hardly a woman before they made me Queen."

"You were not Queen when we first met. We were both masked—do you remember?—but I saw through the masks. I can see through yours now."

"What can you see? Are you pleased with the sight?"

"I can see just—'Toinette.' And 'pleased' is not the word."

"Say that name again. I like hearing it."

"'Toinette.'"

"Axel."

They stood silent, a huge happiness welling up in their hearts. It had taken them many years to find each other thus, but it would be many more before they allowed anything to sunder them for long. She could not reproach herself for any stratagem that had helped to bring him to his true self, his true destiny to-night. She was indeed unconscious of stratagem: she was only conscious of the great happiness which justified both itself and all that had led up to it. A Queen must always stand masked, always talk in whispers to the man she loved. She must pretend, even to herself, that she was not longing to be wrapped in his arms, spirited away to some place where they could forget that there was a world outside, suspicious, unforgiving, grudging their least moment of uncontaminated joy. They would not contaminate it themselves with secretive indulgence. There would be no need. Nothing would matter now except that she would have beside her a man—as she understood men—something strong and trustworthy among all the restlessness and feverish self-seeking of the Court. Her husband could give her a devotion hardly less than Axel's, and a certain unselfish steadiness that most of his countrymen lacked. But even her husband was a Frenchman and therefore unintelligible to her; and Nature had formed him to love others rather than to be beloved. She could be loyal to him, but her love was given to this Northerner whom Chance had sent to be her comfort. She did not need to guess what was passing in the secret dark places of his heart. She knew that he was as content, as certain as she, that neither absence nor marriage, nor the passage of devouring years, could wear away the bond that had been forged at their birth.

She turned to catch his eyes through the hateful masks that must always be between them, and, meeting them, she knew

that she had not deceived herself, nor belied him in her thoughts. It was nearing midnight, but there was time yet. She could gaze at him a little moment more, forbidding the world to intrude upon her fleeting sanctuary.

The world, her world, was not to be so defied. The Princess De Lamballe was already at her elbow, whispering of danger.

"Is it Provence?" asked the Queen.

"No. Worse. M. D'Orléans." The poor Princess would know D'Orléans through any disguise. She was a widow, and it was D'Orléans who had presided over the debaucheries that had brought M. De Lamballe to an early and dishonourable grave. The Queen had perhaps as much cause to hate him, and more to fear: cousins, as well as brothers, can look greedily towards a tottering throne. But as she turned to avoid the distinct menace of his envy, the world broke in with a nearer and sharper challenge.

King Gustav hurried past her, but too late. Pejron had already stumbled against a tall man in a long black domino, and, instead of asking pardon, torn the mask from his face and used it to deal him a glancing slap across the mouth.

The dance petered out. Men ran up in the hope of helping Gustav smother the sudden fire. They could do nothing: it would blaze out again to-morrow in the chill of dawn, and before the sun was hot a young lad would be coughing his lungs out on the dew-spangled grass.

"Come," said Fersen, leading her hurriedly towards the doors. "Can I find your coach for you? You must hurry."

She was glad to hear the tone of command, to feel his firm pressure on her wrist.

"What is it?" she asked, as they left the ballroom: "What was happening?"

"It's what's going to happen! La Marek's a swordsman and Pejron was always a clumsy young fool."

"I don't understand."

"Better not. But I am afraid there will be scandal. King Gustav will probably have to cut short his visit, and take us all home to Sweden."

"Oh?" Then you'll be able to see your sister again." Her tone was curiously unconvincing.

"Yes," he answered, with as little warmth in his voice. "I'll be able to see her for a month or so. Is that your coach there?"

They had emerged into the narrow street. The torches of the waiting linkmen painted a funereal red on its gloomy walls and shuttered windows.

"Yes," she answered, as Mme De Lamballe hastened forward to wake the drowsy coachman in his disguise of borrowed livery. "And then," she said, "after the month or so? You'll come back to France for good—to be with your Regiment?"

"Oh yes, I shall come back. I shall certainly come back."

BOOK TWO
THE DANCE OF KINGS

*

CHAPTER THREE
SHADOWS (1785)

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CARDINAL

LAKE-SIDE

THE PORTRAIT

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UNPREVENTIVE

THE CARDINAL BISHOP OF STRASBOURG sipped his excellent Moselle and smiled towards the huge Venetian mirror at the far end of his dining-room. It reflected the damask-covered dining-table: it reflected in profile, the double row of his guests and dependants: it reflected himself—his florid, occasionally vacuous, but undeniably handsome face. And the Bishop was pleased with all three.

Nothing could be wrong with the dining-table, since it was a family one. It had belonged to the Rohans for some centuries, and, for some centuries, the Rohans had been one of the most powerful and luxurious families in France. Loaded with ancestral silver, it had just been making a worthy altar for the exquisite dinner that was now causing such pleasurable sensations in the Bishop's stomach.

"Madame De La Motte," said the Bishop, "I hope I can tempt you to a few of my grapes. They are from one of my own estates, here at Saverne, and Alsace is famous——"

He smiled at a rather sharp-featured ashen-fair lady of considerable attraction, who sat half-way down the table to his left. She smiled back and answered with another broken sentence. "If they are as good as the *foie gras* from Your Eminence's good town of Strasbourg——" before sweeping two large bunches on to her dessert plate. If Madame De La Motte had not given him to understand that she was of the most ancient lineage, and also an established figure at Versailles, a friend of the Queen herself, the Cardinal Bishop De Rohan might have wondered occasionally whether her table manners did not leave something to be desired. And he could not help wishing that she could come to Saverne without bringing with her her so-called husband, the seedy-looking ex-officer, Rétaux De Villette, who sat swilling wine and scowling at her across the table.

He would not allow so small an annoyance to cloud the pleasure with which he contemplated his other two guests.

Socially speaking, the most important of them was M. De Provence, the rather heavy-featured gentleman who sat on his right. M. De Provence was the King's brother, and resembled him far more closely than he did the younger D'Artois: there was more in him of the ox than the monkey. But he prided himself on a nimbler and more cultivated brain, so far as a taste for *belles-lettres*, a facility in writing graceful little literary articles, can be called a mark of cultivation. But, beyond him—talking of resemblances—was the Bishop's most interesting guest, famous (among other things) for being an almost exact double of that tedious M. Necker: the same smooth egg of a face, the same mild eyes under clownlike eyebrows. It was all the more remarkable since Cagliostro had been born in Palermo, of Sicilian stock, five hundred miles from Geneva by geography, ten thousand more in spirit.

But there was nothing tedious about him; nothing except appearance to link him with King Louis' ex-minister. Envious fools might say that neither was of half so much consequence in the world as they had induced the world to believe, but, so far as his own guest was concerned, the Bishop knew better.

"My dear Count," he said, "you are drinking nothing to-night. I am sure your researches will suffer from too much self-denial."

The eyebrows rose a little, the smooth face took on a new solemnity. The Cardinal Bishop, with no word spoken, was given to understand that when a man is deep in the secrets of the Ancient, not to say the Upper and Nether Worlds, he must at times avoid the cheap solaces that comfort more ordinary men.

The Bishop felt pleasurably chastened, exalted even, by the hint. He glanced at M. De Provence, disappointingly unimpressed by his fellow-guest's abstinence, and then returned to his own image in the mirror, and to thoughts of his own position.

There was nothing in that to chasten him and much, by his own standards, to exalt. Besides being a Rohan, besides being a Bishop and a Cardinal, he was one of the richest men in Europe—a hundred times richer than this inscrutable M. De Provence, and with far more money to play about with than

M. De Provence's royal brother and sister-in-law. This palace at Saverne, the great house in Paris, were only two of many great establishments, many monuments of costly luxury, and (he prided himself) good taste. He had served his country by showing her—and all Europe—that when a Prince of the Church has been born a Frenchman he can combine ecclesiastical splendour with social graces and triumphs, even amorous success: the Bishop plumed himself on being broad-minded and up to date in his ideas of morality. He had served his country as a diplomat, and (again in his own opinion) with credit. During his residence in Vienna, though he had failed to ingratiate himself with the Empress Maria Theresa, he had helped to forward that growing alliance which had culminated in the marriage of her daughter to the Dauphin: but for him, he liked to think, Marie-Antoinette might never have come to France when Louis XV was living, never stepped up to the throne when Louis XV had died, tardily repentant and readily welcomed back from his Pompadours and Dubarrys into the bosom of the Church. And with the new reign, the Cardinal Archbishop of Strasbourg had been somewhat unsuitably rewarded with, had graciously deigned to accept, the position of Grand Almoner at King Louis XVI's more respectable Court. One way and another, he had surely every right to be pleased with himself—with the image of good-natured Success that smiled back at him from the round Venetian mirror.

"I wonder whether His Majesty has yet decided," he said to Provence, "about the Archbishopric of Paris. I thought of it for myself, but I have so many things on hand now, so much that needs my attention. The Count Cagliostro will tell you . . ." His voice trailed away. Of all his successes, perhaps that of attracting really promising or famous men—and women—gave him the warmest thrill of pride.

Self-satisfaction, if not his only failing, was perhaps his most obvious one. Of Hypocrisy, the failing of more intelligent minds than his own, he had little or none: he was saved from that combination of the two vices that besets so many ministers of Christ's Church—that combination which seems to have moved their titular Master (while He was with us on earth) to a vehemence of anger that still shocks the sentimental.

"The Bishop of Toulouse was proposed for the position," said Provence, "but the King took exception. I was there at the time. 'Paris?' he kept on saying—you know his way when he suddenly decides to trust his own judgment for a change. 'But Paris is important! We can't have an atheist for Archbishop in Paris.'" M. De Provence seldom laughed, but his face was contracted into a not very good-natured smile at his brother's resolution.

"Ah, yes," said De Rohan, "my colleague of Toulouse . . ." He paused—solemn and slightly embarrassed. In the matter of religious views—as in every other matter—he attempted to conform with Fashion, steering a middle course between open disbelief and the absurdly tenacious faith of the village *curés* he commanded and underpaid. But he decided that such topics were best avoided in company. He pushed back his chair. "I think we have had enough wine," he said, looking pointedly at the impervious Captain Rétaux, "so maybe we can retire to the drawing-room, or perhaps to Count Cagliostro's *sanctum*. Have you any marvels to show us to-night, Count, while our distinguished visitor is at Saverne?"

The smooth-faced Sicilian hardly seemed to hear: his proud silence seemed to imply a rebuke to the Bishop's frivolous tone. He sat gazing at the water in the crystal finger-bowl before him. When at last he raised his eyes, it was to stand up from table, looking straight before him. "The spirits," he said, "are not at the beck and call of chance visitors—nor even of those who would call lightly upon them for an evening's entertainment. There will be no manifestation to-night. I shall go to my holy place in the South East wing. Do not disturb my contemplations."

He glanced neither at Provence nor his host. With eyes that saw far beyond the luxurious dining-room, far beyond Saverne and Alsace, he turned from the silver-laden table and paced magnificently from the room.

"You told me you had made a catch in Cagliostro," said M. De Provence with a malicious twinkle, "but it seems to me that what you have caught is a Tartar."

The Bishop, too, had risen, with the air of a whipped dog. "Madame De La Motte," he said, "I trust that you will be

seeing the Count to-night before he retires to rest. Please explain to him that I did not mean——”

The blonde lady sat on. For a moment he thought that she was repressing some inexplicable amusement. But when she turned towards him her pale eyes were grave, and she spoke in a husky whisper.

“I do not suppose the Master will call on me to-night,” she said, “and, as you know, I cannot enter the presence without a summons. But if he does, I will try to make your Eminence’s excuses for the breach of that respect which is only his due.” She toyed with the remnant of her grapes. “If you will go now,” she said, “I and my husband will try to think out some way of calming his ruffled spirit.”

M. De Provence had no very high opinion of the Bishop—nor, for that matter, of anyone except himself—but he was surprised to find himself led away without further demur—Madame De La Motte Valois left in possession of the field of conflict.

“A kinswoman of mine, I presume,” he remarked flippantly in the passage. “She seems to have preserved the royal manner.”

“Yes, yes,” said the Bishop, glad to cover his retreat with genealogical excuses. “The Valois family, from whom you Bourbons inherited, left several branches in the obscurer corner of France. My guest, if I may say so politely, is a twig from one of those branches.”

He smiled fatuously at his own wit, and ushered his guest into the drawing-room.

“So that’s what she has been telling you,” said M. De Provence, as he settled his portly form into a chair beside the coffee-set and the elegant decanter of brandy. “And her friend—this Count Cagliostro, if he is a count—what kingdom does he lay claim to?”

“None,” said the Bishop, recovering firmness. “He is above worldly kingdoms. Do you know he has never in his life asked anyone for money? The services he does to Humanity, the wonders he performs for its leaders (such as myself), the miraculous cure of diseases—all are done unpaid, out of the largeness of his heart.”

"The devil they are," said M. De Provence, "and what does the fellow live on?"

The word 'fellow' brought a momentary cloud to the Bishop's brow: but it was soon gone. "His needs are few," he said, seating himself opposite his guest, "and he can easily satisfy them by his art. You know that he has made gold—here in my palace. I only had to provide him with a small quantity of silver, and in a fortnight——"

"He returned you a quarter of its value in gold," suggested Provence.

The Bishop ignored the remark. It was useless to argue with the convinced sceptic. He poured out his own coffee and motioned to his guest to do the same.

"Paris," said M. De Provence, helping himself, "Paris is all agog with Mesmer. You know, animal magnetism, electric rods and all that stuff. My wife's been to him, wants to see if he can help her to have a child. I've told her she's wasting her money—especially since we couldn't leave it a kingdom. That woman at Trianon has seen to that, spawning two boys on top of the girl. And anyway—— Why, what's the matter?"

The Bishop had let his coffee-cup drop with a clatter on the tray: the black stream, overflowing its silver bulwarks, was already dribbling down on to the patterned carpet. "Nothing, nothing," he said hastily, "only I do wish you would not use quite those terms of a lady with whom I happen to be—who happens to be your Queen. Not in my house at any rate."

"I beg your pardon," answered De Provence, without the slightest trace of penitence, "I did not know you were so touchy on the subject of my sister-in-law. And if you could hear some of the 'terms' she uses about you——" He glanced up at his host, hoping to see him wince.

His hope was inexplicably disappointed. The Bishop was positively smiling. "That is not the point," he said. "Her Majesty may have her own reasons for using hard words about me. But . . ."

His voice trailed away, but the smile was fixed. It was a good thing that M. De Provence could not guess at its cause. For the Bishop's memory was dwelling with infinite pleasure on a certain interview in the gardens of Trianon, a white-

robed figure that had approached him as he stood trembling with anticipatory delight, a rose dropped at his feet and a word softly whispered. True, the interview had been quickly and disappointingly interrupted: but it explained why a Somebody might find it politic to use hard words, in public, of the Cardinal Bishop of Strasbourg.

He sighed pleurably, picked up the coffee-cup and rang for a servant. "As to this Mesmerism," he said, "which you tell me is all the rage in Paris, I simply cannot understand how anyone can mention it in the same breath as Count Cagliostro's researches into the Unknown. What is Mesmer? A paltry apothecary from some provincial town of Germany, who has rediscovered what everyone knows—that half the sick people in the world are only sick because they believe themselves to be so; and they can be cured—in some sort of trance if need be—by being made to believe themselves well. The Count—well, I will not belittle his achievements by trying to describe them. Perhaps you know that, besides enjoying the Illumination of the Seventh House, he is Grandmaster of the Oldest and most Sacred of all the Freemasons' Assemblies, the Grand Lodge of Scotland. It holds secrets derived from the ancient Egyptians, travelling north, no doubt, when Jacob's Stone was brought from Egypt as a coronation throne for the Scottish Kings. That queer creature, King Gustav, is said to have travelled as far as Florence to seek out Prince Charles Edward—Pretty Prince Charlie, didn't they use to call him, before he took to drink?—and get from him the secrets of the Scottish Lodge. A foolish journey, ending, I believe, with the old drunkard begging money off the King, without giving up any secrets. What had he to give up? Count Cagliostro is the sole recipient and repository of the Scotto-Egyptian traditions, and Count Cagliostro is not in Florence but in my palace of Saverne." As he grew more rhetorical, the Bishop's rosy cheeks and thick, sensual lips were flushed and animated. M. De Provence began to feel embarrassed, as he was always embarrassed in the presence of enthusiasm.

"Well," he said gruffly, "I hope there will be no Egyptian mummies in my bedroom to-night. I dislike secrets, and I suspect that Freemasonry is either a farce to please people like

you and me and that foolish Madame Lamballe—haven't they made her a Grand Mistress or something?—or else, in some lodges, a very dangerous conspiracy against Church and State. If some of their secrets were revealed, I believe they might bode ill for your mitre and my—I mean, my brother's Crown!"

"Have it your own way," said the Bishop, as the servant entered. "I only wish you were staying here longer and could get to know the Count as well as I know him. . . . No, Jacques—only a fresh coffee-cup and please be quick about it! . . . Count Cagliostro is hardly a man——"

His face was alight again, his tones had begun to vibrate. M. De Provence had had enough.

"I've an article on Racine I wish to finish before I go to bed," he said. "If you will excuse me retiring early—I find that if I don't jot down my ideas as they come to me, I am in danger of losing them altogether. Perhaps Jacques here will light me to my room. Good night, my dear Bishop, and don't sit up too late thinking about your wonderful Count—or about the attractive scion of the Valois."

IN THE EAST WING OF THE PALACE, Cagliostro had extinguished his candles and sat looking out at the stars that lay above Egypt and Jerusalem. He was interested in the stars and even believed in their power to rule men's destiny. To the religious-minded—and in his own queer way, Cagliostro was a religious man—everything is bound up with everything else. But that man can trace the connection, that man can prophesy the petty turns of fortune by scanning the illuminated sky—Cagliostro had seen too much of human presumption and credulity to believe in that. If idiots chose to think he himself knew why a dowager—or her lap-dog—sickened when Venus and Sirius were in connection—well, it was hardly his business to undermine his own influence by disclaiming the knowledge.

He turned back towards the moonlit room. He stood stroking the battered top of the travelling-chest that had accompanied him, through a hundred adventures, from his home in Palermo. It stood inappropriately between the

polished wardrobe and the spotless bed that Saverne provided for its most illustrious guests. He pressed a spring in its side, and released a secret drawer. As he rummaged in it, and drew out a paper, there was a light footfall in the passage, a tapping on his chamber door.

He shot the drawer home, composed his features, and rapped twice with his knuckles. The door opened, and Madame De La Motte-Valois stood ghostlike on the threshold..

"You?" he said.

"Me. He's drunk again."

"Of course. What do you want?"

"I want to know the next move. Money's short."

"That's your affair. You should change your methods." He began to read the paper in his hand, ignoring her presence.

"I prefer them to yours," she said angrily. "Is the English milord in Paris still paying for the privilege of taking your place beside Madame Cagliostro—the Countess Cagliostro—between supper and breakfast?"

He sneered at her, disdaining anger. "That's my affair," he said.

"I asked our friend the Bishop for a thousand, two thousand——"

"Asked? I never ask. You've been asking these three years."

"And getting—till now." Madame De La Motte had closed the door, and came further in, her pale hair whitened, her hungry eyes glinting in the moonbeams.

"Exactly—till now!" snapped Cagliostro. "You've milked your cow dry, and you've come to the farmer for another. I told you to wait for bigger things—even if it meant your Rétaux drinking a little less every night. How much have you had from our host in the Queen's name?"

"Do you think I keep a cash-book? It's all supposed to be going to the Queen's private charities—without acknowledgment. And whenever he jibbed, Rétaux had only to write him another letter, signed with her name, thanking him for his generosity to the poor, and promising him love—some day. It's always worked till now."

"So you're still at that game? I hope Rétaux forges a little

better than he did when I last saw his letters. Any idiot could have told they weren't the Queen's."

"The Bishop's not *any* idiot. He's the King of them all. You should know that by now."

Cagliostro sniggered and turned back to the window. He looked over the Bishop's lordly park, its solemn trees and moon-splashed lawns. "Well," he said, "what do you do now? Why don't you find the D'Oliva woman, dress her up as the Queen and make another *rendezvous*, here in the Bishop's park? The trick worked well enough at Trianon, when King Gustav was visiting, and you seem to like repeating yourself."

"There are limits, even to his idiocy. And she'd have to talk properly this time. We couldn't arrange another interruption before the interview had begun. I'm asking you what to do."

"As you've been so clever in the past," he said, "I think you can do without my help now. I've other things to think of, more important things than your bonnets and Rétaux's wine. Money! You talk about money!"

He tapped the paper he held and then spread his hand in a gesture that indicated his contempt of those who thought merely in thousands.

"My affairs do not need your help," he said, "and they leave me no time to spend on yours. In any case, I shall probably be leaving Saverne soon. Europe needs me."

"I should have thought," she said viciously, "that Europe—some parts of Europe—had had enough of you already. I take it you will not be visiting Naples or Rome—or anywhere else where Giuseppe Balsamo got into such bad odour with the authorities—before he decided to call himself a Count and bestow his presence on more gullible countries."

He had turned his back on her and she came close to him, spitting her hatred into his ear. He thought it incumbent on his dignity as Count and Seer to put up with her proximity, to pay no heed to her hot breath and the disturbing perfume from her silver-blond hair. "Balsamo is an ancient and honourable name," he said, "and I prefer it to a royal one like yours, that must imply either imposture or bastardy. And titles, if not bestowed, can be *earned*."

He waited a moment before folding his paper and moving away. He waited too long, and had spoken too long. He had forgotten how white the moonlight shone, how clearly words and figures could be read over or round a shoulder.

"Then I will leave you to enjoy your earnings," said Madame De La Motte with sudden quietness. "And I hope Paris—or is it London?—will appreciate what Saverne is losing." She had taken a tinder-box and was striking sparks to light a candle. "If I may borrow this," she said. "You seem to have plenty, and our room looks north, away from the moon. It is not visiting us to-night."

Her eyes glittered as she blew up the tinder and lighted the wick. Cagliostro, a little puzzled by her sudden retreat, stood solemn and almost clownlike again beside the curtains of his bed.

She bore the silver candlestick to the door, and turned back upon its threshold. "By the way," she said, "you had better make it London. They say that M. Necker is to be minister again, and it would be confusing for Paris to have two charlatans, of different kinds, who look so curiously alike."

Giuseppe Balsamo had hardly unlatched the drawer in his travelling-chest, hardly resumed his interrupted business, when Madame De La Motte reached her room at the end of two long corridors, and was shaking Rétaux De Villette from the bed upon which he had thrown himself in his dishevelled clothes. Drops of scalding candle-grease on his hand were sufficient to dispel the pleasing dreams that had been raised by Moselle and his accomplice's absence. In a moment he found himself hauled up, sat into a chair and presented with quill and ink.

"Write, fool!" said Madame De La Motte. "You're too drunk to forge to-night, but you can write in your own hand, as if you were a secretary, and I'll do the signature. This must go off to-night."

"But she'd never use a secretary," said the bewildered Captain. "A Queen can't tell her secretary to write 'Joy of my Life' and 'Sweetest Friend' to a Bishop."

"This isn't supposed to be from her," answered the woman, dodging round the table to stand hidden from outside view. "It's His Idiocy himself that's writing—a business letter to a firm in Paris. Are you ready?"

The single candle shone out across the Bishop's garden, across the hayfields and vineyards of Saverne. The good Alsatian countrymen, if any were abroad so late, were glad to see that His Eminence, and the guests of His Eminence, sat up to study the Scriptures by the open window—instead of philandering behind closed curtains as slanderers would have folk think. They went home edified, and remembered His Eminence in such prayers as they could spare from their crops, their children, or their chance of paying arrears on last year's dues.

Madame De La Motte-Valois stood with shoulder pressed against the window-jamb, and watched her paramour with imperious eyes.

"To Messrs. Boehmer and Bassange," she dictated, "Jewellers. Rue De La Harpe.

"Sirs. It has come to my knowledge that you are still seeking a purchaser for the famous Necklace of Diamonds whose necessarily high price has so far placed it above the reach of all except the wealthiest. I am to inform you, though no name can yet be mentioned, that a certain great lady, eager to possess this triumph of your art, has commissioned me to negotiate . . ."

II

IT WAS AUTUMN IN SWEDEN. In the Gottland country the twilight fell early and chill. But the cold dews rising from the lawns of the park at Ljung only served to remind the Fersens that there would be huge fires up at the house, the prospect, in an hour or so, of a warm and friendly evening. The greater part of the family was gathered to welcome and inspect the traveller, the Prodigal Son whom King Gustav had at last brought home.

'Prodigal,' grumbled Count Fredrik, was entirely *le mot juste*. His other children were bad enough, Hedwig and Sophie getting married in the same year and requiring a double dowry, Fabian, twenty-three and seven years younger than his brother, now talking about a separate establishment, a carriage, a *pied-à-terre* in Stockholm and the Lord knew what. But Axel——! At the thought of the family money that Axel was absorbing, with his jaunts round Europe, his American campaign, and the French Regiment he was begging his father to buy for him, Count Fredrik was quite speechless with indignation. He came to the conclusion that since there was nothing to say, it was better to say nothing. It was better to clap his tall, handsome son on the back, feel glad that he was home again—even if he were only staying for a few months—and take him for a walk round the lake before dinner. "And if a father," he said, as they reached the water, "could expect any obedience from his son these days, I'd make you stay ten years and be some use to me in my old age."

There was mist out on the lake, and the leaves on the side-path rustled and crunched beneath their feet. Sophie was somewhere ahead, playing brigands with her little cousin Emily De Geer. Her sister—Hedwig Klinckoström as she now was—had not been able to come: she and her husband were kept at Court in Gripsholm Castle. Fabian, a lover of ceremony, was helping his mother, up at the house, to plan the dinner that was to take place that night. For the moment,

Count Fredrik had Axel to himself, though Axel had insisted on bringing a fishing-rod and was watching the water instead of paying proper attention to his old father's worries.

"It wouldn't be any good," said Axel dreamily. "King Gustav would be off on his travels again and would probably order me to accompany him to Constantinople or help him inspect the Great Wall of China. You might just as well buy me my Royal Swedes—after all, they are your own old Regiment—and let me go back to France in the spring. When you were their colonel, sir, you spent thirteen years in France. And I doubt if you always came home each time Grandad wrote and told you to."

Count Fredrik snorted impatiently. "When your grandfather—" he began, "that is, things were quite different when I was a young man——" He stopped, abandoning the main theme for a side-track. "If King Gustav does any more travelling," he said, "he may come back one day to find that his Kingdom is not exactly——"

"Look!" said Axel suddenly, "isn't that a perch?" He was on his knees immediately, unstrapping the fasteners of his rod, and glancing eagerly from it to the rippling water.

"I wish you'd listen to me," answered his father testily, though his gaze followed his son's. "I know that there were a great number of things, most important things, I wanted to discuss with you. But I can't be expected to remember what they are with you jumping up and down like a jack-in-the-box and . . ." His voice died away: his eye was fixed on the water. "No, it isn't a perch," he said at last. "It's a piece of river-weed. Put that contraption together again: there's no chance of a bite to-night. And do try to give your mind to more serious subjects."

"Yes, Father." Axel rose meekly, brushing the fragments of brown leaf from his knees. He looked round at the trees, up at the house that had been his boyhood's home. "Serious subjects?" he said, and then: "For instance, sir?"

Count Fredrik cleared his throat and resumed the march without saying anything. From the bushes ahead they could hear little Emily De Geer's fresh, thin voice. "But I don't

want to play any more!" she was wailing. "I want to go and see them fish!"

Sophie was heard to say something that apparently quieted the girl, but Count Fredrik was already uneasy. "Of course, with all these women about——" he began. "Perhaps after dinner—— No, Pechlin and Count Johan Engeström are dining with us, aren't they? And that young Ribbing fellow. I have a number of things to discuss with them, things that you ought to interest yourself in, my boy, if you want to take your proper place in this country when I die." He stopped, digging his walking-stick into the moss beside the path. "Not enough rain this year," he said. "It'll be a bad winter for the peasants. And I'm getting old, Axel, I can hardly walk now without my stick. . . . By the way, did you know we were marrying Emily to the Piper boy, Adolf's cousin?"

"But Emily is only twelve!" Axel was used to his father's rambling changes of topic, but he was genuinely surprised at the last item.

"Yes. Yes, of course," said the old gentleman, walking on again. "When I said 'marrying', I only meant planning a marriage for her. It would keep the estates in the family better. If Sophie is really never going to give me a grandchild——"

He had stopped quite dead this time, gazing at the lake. His face had all the soldier's rigidity. He looked as he must have looked when he held King Louis' commission, when the Royal Swedes had fixed bayonets to await the evening onslaught on the outskirts of some Czech village or beside a stream of Saxony. His eyes were fixed on the water. "That's not a perch," he said, "but by God, it's a pike! Out with your rod quickly, boy. But quickly——" he had broken into French. "No, you'd better run up to the house! You'll never land him with that affair of yours. Well, have a try if you like! The old rascal will have gone if you don't get the damned thing unstrapped quicker than that!"

A few moments later, Emily, running along the path, found her great-uncle, his stick discarded, jumping up and down the bank like a boy of twenty; Axel was vainly trying to keep up with his torrent of technical instructions.

"Sophie's hidden somewhere," she said with a pout. "I can't

find her, and I've lost my little bag. Have you seen it, Axel?"

"We've lost our pike," said the Count, watching the prize take fright and cut the lake in a sudden rush for deep water. He resumed his walking-stick and his gout, and put a hand round Emily's chin, lifting her face towards his.

"And, by the way, talking of serious subjects," said Axel, putting up his rod, "the Queen of France asked me to get her a dog in Sweden. She doesn't like the kinds they breed in France; and I told her that Ljung or even Blasieholm might provide her with something more to her taste. Didn't I hear that Ulrika whelped while I was away in Italy?"

"Mother says it's time you all dressed for dinner."

It was Fabian that had suddenly parted the bushes above the path and stood revealed in the gap he had made. Count Fredrik ceased appraising Emily's features as if she were prize bloodstock, and began to fumble for his watch.

Fabian was even more his mother's child than Axel, inheriting nothing from the Count except some of his love for learning and a certain formalism of mind. His face had much of the pleasure-lover in it, and something of the weakling. "Time's getting on," he was saying, "and you mustn't spoil all our arrangements by being late." He looked round at the group of three, his eye passing rapidly from Emily as if from an unavoidable nuisance. "Has Axel persuaded his kind Papa to buy the regiment?" he asked with a trace of grudge, "or is he leaving a little family fortune for the younger son?"

"He's persuaded me to nothing," said Count Fredrik testily, "and we've decided nothing. We were—er—distracted by . . . by a number of things. Is it really time to——" He looked down at the heavy gold watch. "God bless me, so it is!" he exclaimed. "Here, Fabian, give your father an arm in to the house. Axel seems to forget that I'm not so young as I was when he went away." He led Fabian along the path and across the lawn, muttering: "Seven years," in a voice of irritation and calling back at Axel that he must not be late for dinner.

"You know that's all nonsense," said Emily suddenly, as soon as they were alone.

"What is?" he asked.

She came closer, looking up at his graceful six feet of manhood. "About not liking French dogs," she answered. "What she wants is a dog from *you*. Something to remind her of you when you're not there. I hate your Queen of France!"

"Hate her? Whatever for? You couldn't if you knew her. She's——"

"I don't want to hear about her, thank you!" said the child, putting a hand in his. "Let's come and look at the stables," she said. "The hens have been laying all over the place and Lars says we're losing half the eggs."

"You can't leave Sophie hiding and expecting you to come and find her. Poor Sophie might freeze and die. It's going to be cold to-night."

Emily said nothing, tugging at his arm. He followed a few steps, reluctantly. "When I was your age," he said, "I used to hate the stables; I think I was afraid of them. That great arch, and the gates. I believe they were put up in the old time when they were afraid the Danes might invade Gottland."

"Where are you, Emily?" Sophie's voice rang down the path. In a moment she was in sight, tripping towards them. "Oh, there you are! So you've caught your Uncle Axel after all? You're an ungrateful child—no use for your poor old aunt that's quite out of breath playing——" She came up with them and stopped suddenly. There was something in the word 'old' that seemed to set her listening to the ring of her own still youthful voice.

"I suppose it's politics to-night," she said with a frown. "I'm glad Adolf's not here to swell the chorus. But the Count Johan is a whole Riksdag in himself."

"What's Pechlin, then? A *coup d'état*? He's seen a good number of them in his time." Axel squeezed Emily's little hand as if to assure its owner that she was not forgotten amid the grown-up talk. He began to lead her gently towards the house.

"No. Worse. Pechlin's a conspiracy." Sophie kicked at the pebbles as she walked, and her skirts rustled in concert with the autumn leaves. "I shall make Mother come away early from dinner, and leave them to it. Couldn't you contrive to join us in the drawing-room, Axel, and leave Father to do the conspiring?"

They were nearing the house, when Emily suddenly slipped

her hand out of Axel's and ran back towards the waterside. "What's the matter with the child?" asked Sophie.

"She said something about losing her bag. Shall I go back and help her look for it?"

"No. No! I'll go."

"I believe she's wanting——"

"She can't have everything she wants . . . at her age!" said Sophie, with sudden determination. She shepherded him up the steps of the porch with the possessive air of a mother unsure of her child's obedience, and saw him depart smiling through the shadowy hall. Then, as she turned back to recapture Emily, she heard the sound of wheels and horse-hoofs on the drive. She halted on the top of the entrance steps, to see which of the guests was arriving so early: it would do Emily no harm to wait.

A smart cabriolet spun into sight and drew up at the porch. A young lieutenant of the King's Guards jumped out, and saluted her as she stood above him, with mock solemnity. There was nothing very military about him except his uniform; the face, with its heavy jowl and plaintive eyes, was half an artist's and half a butcher's.

"Welcome to Ljung, Count Ribbing," she said, answering his salute with a curtsey. "I'm afraid Father and Axel are both changing for dinner still. You're early."

"And have met you!" he answered, coming close beneath her. "A very pleasant reward for my over-punctuality." Ribbing had been in France, and he plumed himself on his ability to turn neat compliments, as he plumed himself on all his means for attracting the other sex. "May I ask why you are courting a cold in the porch at this time of the evening?" he asked. "Tell me you were going to find a lover in the garden, and I shall be very happy to supplant him!"

Sophie smiled back at him coquettishly. It was pleasant to be reminded that one was attractive, that there were others beside Adolf, and her faithful old Taube, on whom her charms could still work. It was all the pleasanter, when one remembered that this young officer was betrothed to one of little Emily's relations, the richest and most beautiful of the De Geer heiresses.

He looked a little solemn, for all his banter: there was something hard, self-sufficient and almost sombre about this young Ribbing which had always puzzled and repelled her: she decided to tease him.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I was doing what you ought to be doing—instead of standing there making eyes at me. I was going to look for a Miss De Geer."

If she had struck him across the face he could not have frozen more suddenly or so alarmingly. The lightly-meant words had hardly left her lips before she saw that she had thrust a knife into some wound of disappointment and of the humiliation he would feel more intolerably still. His whole face, dim in the twilight, had suddenly changed to a mask of anger and murderous hate. He seemed to choke for words, raised his hand as if to strike. "I am so sorry," she whispered, shrinking back a little. "Are you——? I mean, I thought it was all arranged."

"You couldn't know," he said, recovering himself a little. "It *was* all arranged, until King Gustav decided to put his oar in for his damned equerry. Hans Essen, of all people! But he won't marry her for a month or two yet. I gave the young swine too much to think about! Like that!" He made a savage thrust with his gloved hand. "If my blade hadn't snapped on a rib, he'd be where he ought to be, in Hell! I only wish it had been the King himself."

He collected himself again. "Forgive the details," he said stiffly. "Please regard my engagement to Miss De Geer as cancelled . . . I will wait for your father in the library." He marched past her and in at the front door.

She was left on the porch. If the front door had been (as she had imagined it in childhood) a giant's face with the big brass knob for an eye, it would now be seeing her as a frail silhouette beneath the tall darkness of the Grecian pillars, against a background of grey and freezing sky. But the slight shivering that shook her had little to do with the cold. She could remember thinking as a girl—perhaps in this very spot—how fine it would be to grow up into the kind of woman for whom men fought duels, and even killed each other. One learnt better, growing up. Meanwhile there was an errand out-

standing, a child to be sought among the bushes of the garden.

Axel, looking out of the window of the bedroom where he was changing for dinner, saw his sister cross the lawn toward the lakeside, and wondered what had so delayed her. She had seemed so jealously insistent on her right to find Emily—whether to scold or comfort, he could not tell. He had to confess that women were still a mystery to him, though he was young enough to find them a glorious mystery. His thoughts flew from his dearly-loved Sophie to one who was even dearer. It would be lighter in France at this hour than it was in Sweden; the sun would still be shining, autumn would be painting the trees of Versailles with its gold and scarlet. He thought of her straying beside another and more lordly lakeside, beneath their canopy of waving leaves. Perhaps at this very moment she was stooping to see her own face mirrored in the water, to watch the lazy perch and carp that swam unthreatened by rod and line. It would be pleasant to be with her, to talk as lovers talk, instead of chewing the bitter cud of Swedish party-politics over his father's wine. But he would be back at Versailles before the last red leaf had been shaken earthwards, the first green one was budding above her queenly head. Meanwhile there was his cravat to be tied, his silk stockings to garter up. He watched Sophie disappear into the shrubbery, and turned back to the blotched old glass that had reflected him when first he dressed for school.

There were loud sobs coming from the bushes by the lakeside, the heart-broken sobbing of a child in despair. Sophie hurried down the now gloomy path, peering sideways. As she approached Emily's hiding-place, the girl, seeing who it was that came, tried to break away in escape. Sophie was too quick for her, had swiftly caught her in her arms. "What is it, my little one?" she asked. "My poor little one, tell me what on earth has happened!"

"Nothing. Nothing!" Emily fought the words out through her tears. "I hate you. I wish you'd go away!"

"Tell me what it is, dear. Tell your old aunt all about it." There was a curious comfort for Sophie in the feel of her arms about a child, and a child patently in need of mothering. "There now! Let's dry your eyes," she said. "Let's see what I can do to help you."

"No one can help me! I tell you it's nothing. Only I thought . . . I *did* think he was taking notice of me—until you came and began to talk about those beastly old men and their dinner—after I'm put to bed and not allowed to come down! I'm nearly thirteen, you know, and it's time—oh, what's the good?"

Emily suddenly broke free from the embrace and hurtled her way through the bushes on to the lawn. She stood there more calmly, with a little trickle of blood where a twig had scratched her cheek. She even held out a hand. "Come on, Aunt," she said.

They walked back towards the house. "Not that you are my aunt," said Emily with sudden gravity. "And Axel isn't my uncle, is he? Just cousins. I heard your father talking in the library this morning. He wants me to marry another cousin, that horrid Piper boy. But I'll never marry him. Never, never, never! I'm going to marry Axel!"

III

IN THE GARDEN GALLERY OF VERSAILLES, the Queen's portraitist was uncovering the half-finished canvas on the easel with an almost reverent slowness. There seemed no need for exceptional care, the paint was two days dry, and Marie-Antoinette was hardly a person to exact veneration for her likeness in oils; in any case, there was no one else in the room. The cover lifted off, paints and brushes could be laid out with rather more expedition. There were footsteps at the door. The portraitist turned and prepared to curtsy. Madame Vigée-LeBrun, artist-in-ordinary to the Queen of France, was ready to receive her royal sitter.

The steps proved to be those of another woman, but of one far from royal. The door opened to reveal the homely form of Madame Campan.

"You here?" she said sharply. "It's no use your coming to-day. They're going out for a drive. Your sitting was arranged for yesterday."

"I know." Madame LeBrun was easily dashed by sharpness. "But I wasn't well—this last week——"

"You're expecting!" said Madame Campan with characteristic directness. She walked to the window and began to pull up the sun-blinds. The gallery looked south and west, but it was late afternoon and the September sun had lost all power to scorch. "Nothing to be ashamed of," she said, "only I'm afraid you've missed your appointment. Why don't you let that thing be, until after your baby's born?"

Madame Campan gave the unfinished portrait an almost contemptuous glance. She did not understand art, nor the temperament of its makers: she did not know that, at her first childbirth, this timid, frail Madame LeBrun had worked at her easel up to the last moment, and, after becoming a mother, had got up the same evening to finish her picture before dark.

She was standing now with a woebegone expression, handling her brushes with fingers that clearly itched to make amends

for her two days of enforced idleness. "Where is the Queen?" she asked.

She was answered by a harsh voice from the door. Madame Campan's husband had looked in and was standing pompously on the threshold. "Her Majesty," he said, "has been taking her promenade by the waterside. She is returning now, to go for a drive with the Princess Elisabeth." He pointed down the wide avenue whose majestic trees flamed red in the evening glow. Then he looked at his wife with irritation—an irritation that she and all Versailles knew only too well. "Marie, my dear," he said, "please be quick with those blinds! You should have called a servant to do them. Her Majesty is just returning and I do not want my wife to be seen doing such tasks in the Palace."

"And after the drive?" asked Madame Vigée-LeBrun, looking unhopefully at the fading daylight.

"After the drive," said Madame Campan, "the Queen will be with his Highness the Dauphin—while he is being put to bed." She snapped the last blind up into its place, and gave M. Campan an unwifely look that made as much impression on him as a bee might make on a suit of armour.

"Your appointment was perfectly definite," he said to the artist with lordly discourtesy. "You missed it yesterday. You cannot really expect that we should consult your convenience to-day."

Madame Vigée-LeBrun was accustomed to being at Versailles, and accustomed to M. Campan; but his 'we' was more than she could bear. "When I brought my little son to the Palace," she said, "he asked me, on the way home, whether you were the King. A natural mistake, in a child. But I make my appointments with Her Majesty."

M. Campan's eyes rolled in astonishment. He did not quite believe his ears. But he had no time to recover or think of a suitable counter-attack. Marie-Antoinette was already on the threshold.

"So you've come!" she said with a genuine smile of pleasure. "What a lovely evening. Just right for being painted."

"The carriage is waiting, Your Majesty," said Campan stiffly.

"And the Princess Elizabeth is dressed to go out," added his wife, now his ally against the impertinence of outsiders.

"Well then, the carriage can wait a little longer," answered the Queen, sweeping in to look at her unfinished likeness. "And I am sure Madame Elizabeth will not mind postponing her drive till twilight. She can come and sing to us while the sitting's held. I don't want our friend here to have made her journey for nothing." She turned to Madame Vigée-LeBrun and to the unfinished portrait. "You must have painted out my dress again," she said, "after I'd gone last time. I am sure you had done more of it than that."

"His Highness the Dauphin will be put to bed——" began Madame Campan.

"Without my assistance for once! I don't want to spoil the child. At least—Madame LeBrun, would it be as well if we went into the billiard-room for the sitting? We can talk to my little boy while you paint."

Madame Vigée-LeBrun began to twitter her thanks for the Queen's graciousness. She began hurriedly to gather up her paints into portable form. Joy at the artist's victory over Routine was making her nervous and clumsy. She upset half her tubes over the floor. She was about to stoop and pick them up.

"Stand up!" said the Queen sharply. "No one in your condition should ever stoop. Don't you know that?" She dived down herself, collecting the scattered paints. "M. Campan, will you take——" She rose, smiling. "Will you instruct a servant to take Madame's easel into the billiard-room?"

The child lay on the billiard-table, on his little mattress. He had the family rickets in his spine, and cried when they took him off that hard bed for a more luxurious one. He was not quite three. It was not quite three years since my Lord Cornwallis surrendered Yorktown to King Louis' general, while, two thousand miles away, King Louis was being presented with an heir.

His afternoon rest had strengthened him: he was allowed up for an hour or two before bedtime, though no one con-

sidered fresh air as a possible remedy for his weakness. He was content to limp round the room, dressed in his little sailor-suit, while his mother sat so still in her gold chair and the strange lady painted her from the funny-smelling tubes.

She had not painted long when a servant came to announce M. Merci-D'Argenteau.

"That means politics," said the Queen, "and I refuse to talk politics now. Tell him that Madame Vigée—— No, my brother Joseph doesn't approve of art, except in the abstract. Tell him that I'm with the children and am not receiving."

M. Merci-D'Argenteau was a Belgian from the Austrian Netherlands: he represented the Emperor Joseph at the Court of Versailles.

"That reminds me," said Madame Vigée-LeBrun, "I wanted to tell Your Majesty why I thought it best to paint the dress out and start again. You said the first one was too rich. You wanted——"

"I wanted to stop all this silly talk about my extravagance," said the Queen. "Last time you put me up in the *Salon* I heard what was said. 'Madame Deficit'—wasn't that what they called me?" She laughed musically, but there was a certain lack of conviction, an almost hollow note in her laughter. "I hear more than you think," she added. "And this time, Madame, the simpler the better: they can say I was painted in my night-shirt if they like."

"Well, I started with white muslin," answered Madame LeBrun, painting steadily. "But after you'd gone last time, M. De Calonne suggested to me that it ought to be silk. He said if I painted you in muslin, they'd say you were trying to ruin the manufacturers at Lyons by starting a fashion for Belgian products, Austrian products. They make muslin in Cambrai!"

"Really! It's too much!" Marie-Antoinette rose from her gilt chair and paced down the room. She reached the end of the billiard-table, turned and glared back along it at herself in oils. "You can tell M. De Calonne, next time he interferes, that if he managed the Finances properly there'd be no need——!" She stopped, leant her elbows on the green baize and covered her face with her hands. "No," she said. "I suppose he's

right. I'm Queen of France and they'll never forget I used to be Austrian and . . . Louis! Put down that paint at once! You'll spoil your jacket, you bad boy."

She circumnavigated the table, sailing lightly enough. She caught up her son, and stood for a moment, looking at the picture.

"You must paint me like this one day," she said, "and we'll have Marie-Thérèse or my little Normandie in the picture too. But for the moment—run along, Louis, and play with Aunt Elisabeth till it's time for bed!" She opened the door and called down the passage for the Dauphin's attendants. She seemed suddenly *distracte*, sick at heart. As soon as they were alone again, and she had come to anchor on her chair, Madame Vigée-LeBrun heard her murmur almost with a sob: "What have I done to them? What harm have I ever done them?"

"Your Majesty will forgive me," she said, "if I broached a subject which . . . I thought it my duty——"

"Of course, of course. Go on painting! Is my neck in the right position for you?" Marie-Antoinette held her head high. "You were right to tell me what you did. I was thoughtless too long. I must give them no cause now—clothes, jewels, dances, friends—even muslin! There's only one thing I won't give up, one person, and they shall never know about that. If they must go on spinning tales, let them spin them, like spiders, out of their own stomachs, or find some way to blacken me that I know nothing of. Go on painting, I tell you! Paint Madame Deficit, paint the Austrian Woman. And if you want to please everyone in France—everyone!—you'd better paint me sitting in my shroud."

IV

THE PECHLINS WERE SAID TO BE DUTCH by origin, but Baron Carl von Pechlin was born a Holsteiner, a German, with at least one trait characteristic of his nation: his old and puckered face suggested that, given a different environment in youth, he might have lived a thrifty, honest and straightforward life: but having once decided to throw over Principle, there had been no half-heartedness, and no concealment about the matter. He sat at Count Fersen's board, oozing unscrupulousness and cynicism from every line of his features, every twist of his witty and unbridled tongue.

"Boys!" he was saying. "Boys at the game. Everyone of you, our host included. Do you know that I was being arrested for sedition when Count Fersen was still studying *amo, amas, amat* at the University? And found my way out of gaol, too, within the month. A little gentle pressure in the right place, a little knowing of important people's secrets—people who couldn't afford to have their secrets whispered round Stockholm! There was no need of print in those days—and no opportunity for it. They kept tight hold on the newspapers: none of this Liberty-of-the-Press nonsense that young Gustav hampers himself with. A Newspaper had to say what the ruling party—Hats or Caps—told it to say. They knew how to govern when I was young—and I knew how to make governments feel uncomfortable. You can't do it by being gentlemanly and erudite and constitutional, like our host, nor violent and military as Ribbing would like to be. And you can't do it by spinning theories, Count Johan, with fine French names to back 'em. Your Rousseaus and Diderots are all very well, but they aren't practical. They wouldn't upset a provincial Mayor's authority, let alone a King's like Gustav's. If you want to make things hot for him, hotter than he's making 'em for himself, you'll have to come to me for a lesson in Opposition."

He paused, wheezed, and sipped his wine with the delicacy

of a connoisseur. Pechlin was morally disreputable, but he was an aristocrat of sorts.

Axel and Fabian sat side by side, with their father's eye upon them. Fabian seemed to be watching Ribbing, as if taking mental notes of his Lifeguard's uniform. Ribbing was unconscious of any scrutiny: his eyes were fixed on the wall behind the brothers, his thoughts a hundred miles away.

Axel found Pechlin more worth watching: he was trying to recall what he knew of the Baron's past. When last he was in Sweden, old Pechlin was still in the obscurer corners of the country, whither he had dived when Gustav first made himself its King, over the discredited rubbish-heap of Hats and Caps. It was odd to find him emerging again, laying down the law at such dining-tables as Count Fredrik Fersen's. Gustav's mistakes were binding up some strange alliances among his opponents, and there might be still stranger to come. The old sinner who sat twisting his wine-glass there had begun his machinations when periwigs were full-bottomed and hats a useless ornament for the hand. He might yet adapt himself to the costumes of the looming future, and die with a red cap of Liberty upon his unvenerable brow.

"I disagree!" Count Johan Engeström was speaking in his curiously vibrant tones. If his face suggested the priest rather than the politician, it was a priest wholly sincere and absorbed in his Creed: his dark eyes smouldered with fanatical fires. "Theories are all-important," he said, "they are the most practical things in the world. How can you fight a campaign without plans and strategy? How can you alter governments without thinking out the nature of all Government? That was precisely why our old Hat and Cap parties failed, why this Gustav man found it so easy to outwit us. Neither party had a theory. The Hats took money from France, the Caps from Russia—but they hadn't an idea between them. You must have ideas, you must think out what you want to do before you begin doing it." He paused, irritably refusing the decanter that Count Fredrik was trying to pass him. "Unless," he said with a sudden wry smile, "unless you happen to be English. In which case the more muddle-headed you are, the better you seem to succeed."

"Oh, the English!" Baron Pechlin made an almost vulgar gesture of contempt. "They are only muddle-headed," he said, "because they are so busy deceiving themselves. I don't mind rogues. I'm a rogue myself. But I never could see the advantage of being a hypocrite."

"There is a difference," said Count Fersen drily, "between self-deception and hypocrisy. Until other nations understand the difference, and cease to misjudge England, she will go on cornering all her markets and winning all her wars. Except of course——" he smiled at Axel, "her wars against Americans, who can plumb the English mystery . . . Count Johan, if you are not taking any more wine yourself, perhaps you will pass the decanter to Lieutenant Ribbing—— Mind you, I never grudged England her success, even when I was serving against her under King Louis. I have the highest respect for the English."

"The Americans haven't," said Axel, "for all their plumbing. When I left America, they were suggesting that American children should be taught in school all the details of the atrocities committed in the last war. Most of them were the work of King George's Red Indian allies, but I fear some were committed by King George's troops."

"Of course they were!" Baron Pechlin was contemptuous. "Give soldiers arms, starve them, excite them and shoot at them a little, and of course they'll take it out of defenceless civilians occasionally. Besides, it has a military value; it creates Terror. I served in the Pomeranian war against Prussia, and I am proud to say I did not feel sentimental about our peasants when old Fritz's Brandenburgers smoked them out of their houses and shot a few children. War is war. Only hypocrites like the English pretend that there is any room for decency or even hesitation in it."

"I speak under correction from my son," said Count Fredrik quietly, "because he has more recent experience of war, and war against the English. But even if one recognises that War and Crime are inseparable, there seems to me to be a great difference between a reluctant—shall we say an apologetic criminal?—and one who enjoys justifying his crimes, Baron Pechlin, or even gloats over the results. The Germans, for

instance, are naturally kindlier than the English, in peacetime, but military necessity—their unanswerable military theory, Count Johan!—seems to turn them into nightmare-ridden monsters. I prefer hypocrites. I prefer those who commit their crimes with a sick heart. Now may I change the subject to something a little less gruesome?”

He frowned round the circle of his guests, making it perfectly clear that he had not spoken under correction from Axel or anyone else—that he was not going to allow any further discussion of the topic at his board.

He had certainly silenced them for the moment. He turned to Count Johan with a sunnier face.

“I have another reason for respecting England,” he said. “It is—or it was when I was young—the only country where gentlemen teach their sons a proper regard for Literature and Art—even when they are not quite sure what those two words mean. I happen to be quite sure, at least so far as Literature is concerned. But I’m only a Swede, and I can’t get Axel there to speak respectfully of his Tacitus or his Thucydides. And as for reading them——!”

“I’ve read both,” said Fabian self-righteously, “and managed to enjoy them. You mustn’t judge Sweden by its Prodigal Sons.”

“You’re wandering from the point,” snapped Lieutenant Ribbing unexpectedly. “You were discussing Government.”

Everyone looked surprised, wondering how long Ribbing had been listening.

“We were,” said Pechlin. “And Count Johan practically admitted that the English govern themselves—and govern themselves devilish well—without a ghost of a theory. Your beloved French hair-splitters are always pointing out that the English Constitution, which is the most ramshackle affair in Europe, works perfectly in practice. Voltaire was never tired of praising it—and ignoring its anomalies.”

“He gave me two hours’ praise of them,” said Axel, glad to make a contribution, “when I visited him at Ferney. That is, the second day I went. The first day, he just sent out a message that he had taken a pill the night before and was not at home to travellers.”

"And the second day?" Count Johan, though clearly impatient of purgative irrelevancies, was looking at Axel with a new and rather flattering interest. It was something, felt Axel, to have travelled and seen the world: it was something to come back to the dining-table to which he had been summoned as a schoolboy and not feel like a schoolboy still.

"The second day he appeared in woollen stockings, Greek sandals and a dirty dressing-gown. But his eyes were as bright as a bird's, though he must have been eighty. As I say, he talked for two hours—mainly about the English Constitution. He told me that it was the acme of human wisdom, and that was why it had lasted so long."

"And you did not agree?" said his father; he had heard Axel's story before, if only by letter; he was quite glad to give the boy a prompt.

"I did not," said Axel. "I was studying to be a soldier at the time and I told him that the English Constitution had lasted so long because England was an island."

He drew a grunt of agreement from Ribbing, a proprietary smile from his father. Count Johan looked put out, waving an irritated hand. "You were young, of course," he said. "Even younger than you are now. I hope you would not be so hasty in contradicting— Yes, what is it?"

"It's only me." Sophie had entered and was standing over Axel's chair. "There's a man come round about a dog, Axel," she continued unblushingly. "And there's also a late post in, with a letter for you. Come and see what it is, and bring Fabian to keep Mother amused. They can easily talk Constitutions here without you two. They've done nothing else, all the seven years you've been away."

"A letter? From France?" Axel had risen quickly. "If you'll excuse me, Father," he said. "Come on, Fabian."

"It doesn't look French," answered Sophie as she led him out of the door. "The post rode in from Gripsholm: it may be from Hedwig at Court."

They passed out, leaving the four elder men to their wine and politics. Count Johan was soon deep in plans of campaign for the next Riksdag that King Gustav summoned, or (as Pechlin put it) could be manœuvred into summoning. There

would be agents and agitators for Pechlin to find in byways, spokesmen whom Count Fredrik Fersen must interview in their more lordly houses. Ribbing, out of his depths at first, was soon making suggestions that might bear fruit—so long as the fruit could be reckoned to taste bitter in King Gustav's mouth. They would begin at once: they need not fear to lose their labour by overlong waiting. When Gustav had changed the Constitution by *coup d'état*, he had refrained, with doctrinaire self-denial, from stripping Riksdags of their power over the purse; and thus, in Pechlin's view as well as Count Johan's, assured his own defeat in the long run. As soon as he needed extra money, he must call the Houses together and give them a chance to trip him up. "And it will not be long before he has to do that," said Count Fersen sententiously. "My daughter Hedwig's letters from Gripsholm are full of tales about the King's extravagances. Heaven knows what he spends on the little theatre, there—costumes, scenery and all that trash. And it isn't his only one. The Drottningholm one costs even more."

"They tell me," said Pechlin with a twinkle of his puckered eyes, "that King Gustav is bringing up his little son to take an interest in the Theatre, making the poor brat sit through rehearsals and hear actors their lines. I know what that means! The child'll grow up to hate the whole business. The instant we are rid of Gustav III, Gustav IV will turn the key on the Drottningholm theatre and make a lumber-room of it—costumes and scenery and all. And it'll probably stay a lumber-room for a hundred and fifty years!"

"The instant we're rid of him!" repeated Count Johan impatiently. "You talk as if it were going to happen to-morrow. I'm afraid there's a long life ahead of King Gustav, years of work ahead of us, choosing our men, fighting inch by inch in the Riksdags, before we can enforce our theory of Government on Sweden."

He stared fiercely round on the word 'theory', as though daring Pechlin to sneer at him again. But Pechlin had fallen silent and allowed the tirade to spend its strength before he spoke again.

"I wonder," he said, when Count Johan had finished, "just

how long a life there is in front of our Gustav. He's healthy enough, I know, but I sometimes wonder." He seemed to fall into reverie, and it was not broken by the re-entrance of Axel, an open letter in his hand.

"It's from the King himself," he said. "He wants me and Fabian at Gripsholm by next Tuesday. It's a great nuisance——"

"'Nuisance' isn't the word!" said his father, rising in wrath. "Am I never to be allowed my own children's company? Is the Fersen family to be at Gustav's beck and call the whole winter—the first winter you're home after seven years! I really think you'd better write back and say—No. Wait a minute." He paced to the fireplace and turned back, his brow knitted.

"Why wait a minute?" asked Ribbing between tight lips. "Write at once and tell Gustav to go to—where he belongs. If he makes it his business to break up every home in Sweden for the sake of his Court, it's our duty to resist him. Count Johan there will tell you all about the theory of resisting autocracy. I know the practice. I did it with a sword!"

"It seems odd that you are still in his Life Guard," said Axel. "And aren't we all making mountains out of a molehill? I want to see Hedwig and the husband that Father's married her off to. I want to see Gripsholm. I don't even mind seeing more of King Gustav—so long as he doesn't make me act in one of his damned plays. He says in a postscript here he has just written one on our Queen Cristina. But unless I am cast to play Descartes in it, I shall probably be back in a week or so, and can spend the rest of my time at Ljung or Blasieholm. So if Father doesn't mind——"

"No, no," said Count Fredrik hastily. "As you say, mountains and molehills! And after all, he is still King. He's within his rights, his Constitutional rights, in ordering Axel to Court."

He looked up at his political colleagues with some nervousness, hoping that they were not attributing his conscientious submission to any weakness. "Run along to your mother," he said to Axel. "Tell her that we are just coming to the drawing-room . . . that is, if you gentlemen have finished

your wine? You'll stay the night, of course, and we can have another talk in the morning."

They had finished their wine, but they still sat on. Even Axel's departure was no signal for movement. For a moment or two, Count Fersen, standing by his own hearth, had a faint premonition that he might be excluded from some of tomorrow's discussions.

Count Johan was the first to rise, a puzzled frown on the half-clerical face. Ribbing, following suit, looked back at Pechlin, as though waiting for a lead.

The Baron gave none. He sat withered and motionless as a reptile. For a moment there was something sinister in his stillness. But when he spoke at last it was in an almost sugary tone, a kind of reminiscent purr.

"There's a fellow," he said slowly, "that lives near one of my timber estates in the country. He's a retired Captain or something—left the Service in a huff. He had a curious childhood, I believe: his mother died early, and his father was a queer fish, always star-gazing or messing about with Alchemy. We might find the man useful, sooner or later. He does nothing nowadays, except stay at home and make his wife's life a burden to her—when she isn't doing the same for him!"

"What's the name?" asked Johan Engeström.

"I was trying to remember. Rather like yours, only it began with an A. Angaström or—no, Anckarström, that was it! Captain Jakob Anckarström. Wears a beard, if you please! Used to be rather handsome as a boy, when he was one of the pages at King Gustav's Court. They said he left it because Gustav tried—— No, I suppose I mustn't start that kind of story when we are just going along to the ladies in the drawing-room!" Baron Pechlin chuckled—an unattractive noise.

"No, indeed," said Count Fredrik stiffly. "Gossip was always——"

"If Gustav did suggest anything of the sort to him," interrupted Pechlin, "Anckarström has never forgiven him for it. He's rather—what the English call Puritanical. And now he just sits there, hating Gustav, in that damp and poky old house on the edge of my forest. He'd be a good character in a play."

"A soldier, you said?" asked Ribbing, pushing back his chair. "And likely to be useful?" Count Johan took a step towards them. "In what capacity?" he inquired. "What are his political principles—his ideas on Government?"

"I don't know that he's got any." Baron Pechlin smiled. "Just an old grudge. And it may not be so old as people pretend. It may be just the money he lost when King Gustav started playing monkey-tricks with the Currency. That's the worst of a gentleman turning hermit—he doesn't hear about things till it's too late to sell out!"

"He sounds to me more like a Troll than a hermit," said Count Fredrik, his hand upon the door-knob. "I seem to remember from my nursery books that Trolls wear beards; and it must be more than a century since gentlemen did!"

He motioned his guests to precede him and Ribbing rose at last. Count Johan moved a step or two, and then stopped suddenly.

"Anckarström?" he said. "But that was the name of that creature—— Wasn't it Anckarström that used to make a habit of going to all the public executions when he was young, standing right under the scaffold? And weren't there stories about him torturing cats or something, just for the fun of the thing? If it's the man I'm thinking of, he's surely not the sort of man we should be inviting to join us at this juncture."

Ribbing stood silent, but Count Fersen was moved to indignation. "Nor at any juncture!" he said. "I'm beginning to remember the fellow—a most unpleasant case. If Baron Pechlin intends to include Captain Anckarström in his Opposition Party, I'll thank you to leave me out!"

He turned back to the door, all the angrier at detecting a slight sneer on Lieutenant Ribbing's face. Count Johan did not seem certain whether to follow or to join the strangely immobile group at the table. "Of course, circumstances may compel one——" he began. "I'd rather not—— However, there's no need to decide all that to-night."

Pechlin had risen at last. He lifted his battered old carcase from the leather cushion, and stood bowed for a moment, his gaze fixed on the white table-cloth, the remnants of Count Fersen's dinner-party. Half a century of watchfulness and

intrigue seemed to be studying a haphazard pattern of bread-crumbs and wine-spots.

"There are junctures and junctures," he said, slightly parodying the word. "The folk in Stockholm had queer tales to tell of Jakob Anckarström ten years ago. Ten years hence, they may have queerer still."

He looked up at last, with a smile that was almost charming on his goblin face. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "and shall we join the ladies?"

THE CHARCOAL GLOWED RED IN THE LITTLE stove of damascened copper which hardly warmed the Sultan's audience-room. It was still early spring in Constantinople, and a cold wind from the north had chilled the city since dawn. It had dropped with evening, and a bright but cheerless sun gilded the dome of Santa Sophia and flecked the wintry waves of Straits and harbours. It shone through the latticed window of the audience-room, gilding the faint cloud of perfumed smoke which rose from a tray above the insufficient stove. There were no fireplaces in the palace, nothing that might not have found a place in the tents of the Sultan's forebears. Three centuries and more had passed since they had driven the heirs of Rome, the heirs of Constantine the Great, from the city which bore his name. But they were nomads still, ignoring the comforts of city-dwellers.

They had not lost the strange dignity of the nomad. The Sultan sat rigid as a rock upon his scarlet divan, a foot or two above the crouching figure of his Grand Vizier. It was a long time since either had spoken. There was no sound in the room, only the distant shout of the slave-drivers, the crack of whips upon the wharfs of the harbour.

There had been a time when Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Turkey, and Caliph of the Faithful, had been little better than an idiot. They had chained and caged him, as men chain lunatics, while a Vizier governed in his name. Things had altered now. He had (or imagined himself to have) a will of his own; and if the Grand Vizier Yussouf still governed, still bound his master down, it was with chains of silk and gossamer.

Both men were perhaps thinking of evening, of the cowed women who awaited them in their two seraglios—the Vizier's less populous, but as carefully selected as the Sultan's. Both knew that there was something that must first be said, something that must be decided between them.

It was the Sultan who broke the silence, heralding his words

with the long sigh of a man who speaks to worlds infinitely below his own. "The ways of the Giaours are strange," he said, "as well as discreditable to their Faith. They call upon the name of the Nazarene, but they come to us True Believers for help and alliance to destroy each other. There is no fathoming their knavery, and I will have no dealings with them."

The Vizier sat silent, with no shade of disappointment on his face. He was Vizier because he had known when to sit silent, when and how little to speak.

"They cannot even beg for themselves," said the Sultan. "The Spaniard craves our assistance for Genoa against Venice, the Frenchman asks if we will help the Swede by falling upon Russia. Why must this M. St. Priest enquire whether we wish ill or well to King Gustav?"

The question gave Yussouf his cue to speak. "The words of Your Greatness," he said, "are as a feather in the turban of Wisdom. It was only my folly that thought to draw profit for the True Religion from the bickerings of Christian fools. M. St. Priest is nothing. Soon his King will be nothing. The Court of France does not even know of its own doom, though already it is whispered in the bazaars of Stamboul that rogues and jewel-thieves are bringing the French King to his ruin, by discrediting his Queen. The Prophet was indeed inspired when he directed that men should have many wives, but grant power and pride to none of them."

The Sultan's face was immovable: it was not for him to acknowledge that he had not the faintest notion what his Vizier meant by this talk of gossip in the bazaars. "I know as well as you," he said, "that France will soon be as nothing. But I do not know why you have presumed to speak to me in the words of this M. St. Priest."

"I thought in my folly," answered the Vizier, "that the Wrath of Your Mightiness might soon be stirred against the Russians . . . not now, maybe, but in two years, or four. I thought of their ships sent impudently into our seas by the woman who rules from Moscow, of Russian bayonets that have dared to gleam round the cliffs of our Crimea. I could not know, only Your Ineffable Wisdom knew, that we must

chastise them without the help of Christian allies. I was so mad as to think that the Swedish King could be made to serve the True Faith with his paltry fleets and armies. I remembered that Finland is a Pashalik of Sweden, and that it is but a few leagues from the Finnish border to Saint Petersburg itself."

He paused a moment, drew breath, and then decided he could risk a further advance. "It is known to Your Omniscience," he said, "that there was once a King of Sweden who led his armies into the Russian Ukraine, who crossed our borders into Turkey itself. Your Wisdom will tell me that it was as a defeated suppliant that King Carl came over our frontier, with but a beaten remnant of his army. But before the fight at Poltava he had been ten years a conqueror, he had made the Tsar tremble in his very Kremlin. All these things are as bulrushes reflected clearly in the tranquil waters of Your Wisdom's mind. But I could not know in which direction they pointed, whether as spear-heads of an alliance between the Swede and the Turk or as rods to chastise the presumption of such Giaours as offer us their contemptible assistance."

It was best to keep one's eyes lowered after such a speech, it was best to stare hard at the seams of one's crimson shoes. The Sultan's face was under strict control, but some shade upon it might suggest that his wisdom might not reflect the facts related with quite the clarity that was imputed to it . . . might even suggest that he had never heard of Sweden except as a fourth-rate Power without possible effect upon the fortunes of Europe or of Turkey. But when the Vizier looked up again, Abdul Hamid had recovered from any surprise he might have experienced, and was already beginning to speak with his usual domineering quietness.

"All this is known to me," he said, "and there was no need to speak of it again. It is an ancient tale, and my care is given to the times in which we live. I wonder more whether this present King is ready for a war, whether his Sweden will follow him to battle. I have heard strange stories from his country, stories of which you know nothing."

"I indeed know nothing," answered Yussouf. "I am here but to execute what Your Subtlety commands. But I am told

that King Gustav is indeed ready, that his people will gladly follow him, having long smarted under the insults of Russia. It is not many years since the Tsarina was mistress of their country, buying its Council of Emirs with Russian gold. Gustav has humbled the Emirs, disabling their Council. He is King indeed, and now thirsts for revenge against his ancient enemy."

"Revenge?" asked Abdul Hamid, his eyes clouded with bewilderment. "Is Revenge the motive of this coming war?"

"In part," answered the Vizier, "though maybe Sweden, maybe King Gustav himself does not know all that stirs within their hearts. He has made himself King, shaking off the bonds that kept his father impotent: he cannot be firmly so until he has proved his kingship in war. Sweden feels herself a great people again; she can only prove her greatness, only sever the bonds of Russian gold and Russian pride, by following him to battle."

"All this may be true," said the Sultan impatiently, "but I have been told that he was so foolish as to keep this Council you spoke of in being, to leave Peace and War in its purchasable hands. I do not ask you to read me this riddle: I only ask how he can wage war if he is indeed so hampered by his own weakness."

The Vizier stirred a little on the floor, permitting himself a smile. "Your Serenity knows," he said, "that all Giaours are hypocrites. King Gustav is lord of Sweden, and his promises to his Council are as wind. When he says War, then there will be War. His puny fleets and armies may close upon St. Petersburg, while your victorious banners advance northwards to fly above the Kremlin. Only Your Wisdom could have thought of such an alliance, only Your Subtlety could have suggested so unlikely a combination between True Believers and the Christian enemies of Russia."

He looked up at his titular master, wondering whether he had gone too far. But the Sultan's eyes were fixed upon the complex pattern of the filigree stove, the Sultan's face showed no sign of resenting the shameless flattery. When the Sultan looked up, it was to raise his hands and clap twice. The

curtains parted in the doorway. A white-robed figure knelt beneath them.

"Tell the Grand Eunuch," said the Sultan, "that I shall enter the seraglio in a minute's time. Bid him see that all is ready for my coming. Go!"

He paused a moment, waiting until the Vizier had risen. Then he uncramped his legs from the divan, stood upright, and walked slowly to the window. The chequered light fell on his green turban, his lined and yellowed face, the curling foam of his black beard.

"Let the King of Sweden wait," he said. "I repeat that I will have no dealings with Christians now. Perhaps in two years, or maybe four . . ." He paused to frown: he could not help wondering whether it was his own words or another man's that he seemed to be echoing. "Until then," he said, with unnecessary emphasis, "until then, there is peace."

He screwed up his eyes, peering through the jagged arabesque of the sunlit window. When he spoke again, there was a hint of suppressed irritation in his voice.

"The audience is ended," he said.

VI

MADAME ELIZABETH WAS TAKING A MODELLING lesson from her instructress in her drawing-room at Versailles. King Louis had always encouraged her to cultivate some hobby that kept the hands busy, and his dutiful sister responded to the encouragement. But she feared that she would never shape the wax flowers and peaches as cleverly as he had forged locks—in the happy days before these hateful politics denied him all recreation except his hunting.

Madame Elizabeth radiated health and good nature, but she could hardly be called beautiful. She enjoyed her modelling lessons best when M. Curtius came to teach her himself, instead of sending this awed niece of his to the Palace. M. Curtius was more than handsome, he was magnificent—with his lionlike head and deep, prophetic eyes. He came from the Swiss mountains, and she, having seen few mountains, found the thought of them infinitely romantic: he appealed, equally vaguely, to her religious sense, and Madame Elizabeth was nothing if not religious. But the modelling itself was a pleasure, and it was always flattering to see the niece's round eyes grow rounder still at the marvels of Versailles.

"Ought I to be using the flat stick for this dark green wax?" asked Madame Elizabeth. "I cannot remember what M. Curtius said."

"No, oh no! Uncle never recommends that," answered the girl, a little flustered. "I am sorry, Madame, I was not watching. I was looking at your dress."

"It pleases you?" Madame Elizabeth dropped her stick on the streaky tray and dabbed her forefinger in a little pot of grease. "I put it on for the Court Mass to-day. No, it's not Sunday, but it's the Assumption. You wouldn't understand that. You're a Protestant, aren't you?"

Mademoiselle Grossholz—Fräulein Maria Grossholts, as she had been brought up to call herself before the family left Switzerland to go in for showmanship—pursed her prim lips

and remembered that she had been warned to avoid certain topics at Versailles.

"Uncle's training me in what he calls Observation," she said. "People's faces and hair-dressing and clothes. Especially great people like Madame."

"Am I so great?" asked the King's sister; she laughed wistfully, wondering whether a time would ever come when her existence was of the slightest interest to his kingdom, or any kingdom but that of Heaven. "And may I ask why M. Curtius has suddenly grown so interested in High Society? Don't tell me he is one of those horrid men that write little paragraphs for the Newspapers. If I thought that, I'd warn people at Court never to go into his Exhibition again."

"No, no! Not newspapers! We've always been quite respectable!" The girl seemed genuinely horrified. "But I don't think I ought to tell Madame. It's supposed to be a secret still."

"Then I shall continue to think it's a discreditable one," said the Princess, teasing, "until you let me into it. The newspapers these days——" she stopped suddenly, seeing the look of real agony on the girl's face, and bent over the wax once more. "By the way, Mademoiselle Grossholz," she said, "do you know that I've never asked you your Christian name?"

The girl seemed bewildered by the tactful but sudden change of subject. "Marie," she said simply.

"Well, Marie is a beautiful name," began the Princess kindly, "quite apart from being half the Queen's name. You should be proud——" She stopped short, hearing a heavy tramp in the passage outside. "That must be the Switzers changing Guard," she said. "It's almost time to wash my hands and get ready for Mass. But I must just finish these ivy-leaves."

Mademoiselle Grossholz did not accept the implied invitation to resume her rôle of instructress. She sat listening to the martial sounds from the passage, waiting, perhaps for the '*Soldaten—Links!*' or '*Rechts!*' that would remind her of her home.

"By the way," said the Princess, "didn't M. Curtius tell me that you had a brother in the King's Switzers?"

"Two," said Marie proudly, "and three cousins. And we are all glad to be serving His Majesty—or His Majesty's sister."

Elizabeth blushed a little: compliments were so common at Versailles, and heartfelt ones so rare. "I am glad that they—and you—are contented with your positions," she said. "I sometimes think that soldiers must find a mere Palace guard——" She looked back at her waxen ivy-leaves. "Well," she said, "I suppose I must call those finished. They're a little spindly." She frowned in slight dissatisfaction. They were the right colour: Mademoiselle Grossholz had chosen the wax. But in shape they seemed halfway between holly and pine-needles.

As she wiped her fingers, with brows still knit, the door opened and a scarlet-coated Switzer stepped in.

"M. the Chamberlain's compliments," he said in his hoarse French, "and a message is being sent round from Monsignor the Grand Almoner that Mass is likely to be a little late. Monsignor the Grand Almoner expresses his regret, but their Majesties are still in conference."

He gave a bold wink at the Fräulein, and clattered out into the passage. Oddly enough, she did not seem to have noticed the interruption. Her mind had apparently flown back to an earlier stage in the conversation.

"In case Madame still suspects my uncle of having any truck with newspaper people," she said, "I don't think it would do any harm if I told Madame the truth." She paused, and then added, with girlish emphasis—"so long as Madame promises *faithfully* not to tell *anyone*." She looked round the room, as if in fear of betraying the trade-secrets of her family to an open door or window. "You know that my uncle began with flowers and fruit," she said. "The people in Berne used to buy them in glass cases for their mantelpieces. Then he tried the bas-reliefs—cows going past a *chalet*, places of interest, head-and-shoulder portraits of important people. He even had the Burgomaster of Zürich to sit to him once. Well, this is the secret—you won't tell anyone, will you? He wants to open a new kind of exhibition altogether. Not bas-reliefs, but life-size busts of people, real people, if he can get them to

sit to him properly, or remember their features well enough. And he was even talking yesterday"—her voice dropped to a solemn whisper—"of having a few full-length figures, life-size too, in their real clothes, or copies of their real clothes. Isn't that a wonderful idea? No one but Uncle could ever have thought of it."

The Princess looked as impressed as she could manage. "And is he training you to help him," she asked, "by taking notes of my dress? Am I to be among the waxworks?"

"Oh no, I hardly think so," answered the girl. "It was just practice. And I only hope I shall be able to help him. I can't see how I could."

Madame Elizabeth walked to one of the mirrors on the wall, put a touch or two to her hair, and then tugged the bell-pull that hung beside it. "I'm sure you'll be very useful to him," she said, "until you go off and marry one of your brother's friends in the Switzers—and have so many babies that you've no time for wax figures."

"No, I don't think I shall marry a soldier." The girl's face was quite solemn, reflected in the mirror. "I couldn't bear him being in danger."

"But the Palace Guard—they're hardly soldiers. I've often thought how silly it is to make them carry cartridges. They never go to a war, and even if there were a riot or something in dear old humdrum Versailles, my brother would not allow them to shoot at people."

"If His Majesty allowed them to be shot at," said the girl with sudden intensity, "he would soon see whether they were soldiers or not. I am sure the Switzers are as brave, and braver, than any Frenchmen."

Madame Elizabeth tugged at the bell-rope again and turned back from the mirror. "And you don't want to marry a brave man?" she asked lightly, avoiding the girl's eyes. "You want peace and quiet—and plenty of money, I suppose. We must look out for some rich *bourgeois* for you, and then perhaps he can finance your Uncle's new waxworks."

"Perhaps." Marie spoke without interest, as if lost in her own train of thought. She could hardly foresee the rich *bourgeois* who awaited her, ten years and more ahead, or know

that she would one day change her present name for the more famous one of Madame Tussaud.

The Princess, too, had lost interest in the conversation, and was merely impatient for an answer to her bell. "Ah, there you are, Suzanne!" she said, as she turned to see the door half open.

"Sorry. Only me!" The door swung further, and her brother D'Artois stepped in. "So you are arranging husbands for each other? Oh, yes, I've been eavesdropping! And please explain to your little Swiss friend that I am not very *bourgeois*, and not half as rich as I'd like—besides being married already! By the way, if you've been ringing for Suzanne, I may as well tell you that nothing works in this moth-eaten palace: even the bells are probably out of order."

"I don't know how you can call Versailles moth-eaten," countered his sister, "when you live in the Temple yourself. . . . You may go, Mademoiselle Marie . . . The Temple's positively Gothic."

"I know. I like Gothic," said D'Artois, with half an eye for the girl's ankle, as she curtsied and retired. "It pleases my taste for the extraordinary—being extraordinary myself. The Queen told me to pull it down, last time she and Louis came to supper there. Said it gave her the creeps, and made her feel as if they were prisoners in one of my dungeons, waiting to have their heads cut off!" He took up a little palette-knife from the table and sliced petulantly at a slab of pink wax. "Oh, and talking of Louis," he said, "do you know what I came in here for? I was sent to ask if you'd go and rout him out of his conference. They must have forgotten about this damned Mass."

"Sent? Who sent you?"

"The whole Court. They're standing in rows outside the Chapel, like a lot of dummies, wondering what time they'll get dinner to-day. And that Almoner fellow, Rohan, has quite got to the end of his excuses for the Queen . . . I say—is Rohan really in love with our dear brother's wife? He talks about her as if he were head-over-heels."

She ignored the question. "Why should I go?" she asked. "Go yourself!"

"No, that wouldn't do at all! Louis knows I don't care a

brass button whether I hear Mass or not, and he'd suspect me of trying to pry into political secrets—God knows what it is they're discussing in there! Rohan seems to think that it's something to do with *him*, and says it would be tactless for him to play the Grand Almoner and interrupt the conference in order to get them to the Chapel. So you've been chosen by the unanimous vote of the dummies to act as our ecclesiastical ambassador *in partibus Ludovicensibus*. Most suitable. You are King Ludovic's dear sister: you know nothing whatever about politics: and you're depressingly pious. So no more '*Noli episcopari*'—dammit, Assumption's making quite a Latin scholar of me!—and there's no need for your Suzanne either." He hustled his sister towards the door as he spoke, "nor of another look in the mirror. You can't coquette with brother Louis, still less with the Almighty, and anyway your hair looks as good as you'll ever get it to look."

MADAME ELIZABETH HAD NEVER SEEN HER brother look so worried, nor Marie-Antoinette so furious. The King, with two ministers standing behind him, sat on a little gilt chair that hardly seemed strong enough to support his bulk—or the load of his obvious anxiety. The Queen was pacing up and down the council-room—from the sunlit window to the table—with the lithe grace and menace of an angry leopard. When the Switzers at the door yielded, with protests, to Elizabeth's insistence on her right of entry, she stopped to turn on her sister-in-law in a new access of rage.

"How dare you?" she cried, stamping her foot. "How dare you break in here? You know very well you have no right of entry! What has come over France—the Queen at the mercy of all the thieves and swindlers in the country, the King's council open for anybody to walk into when she likes! If I had my way——"

"Gently, my dear, gently!" King Louis rose nervously from his chair. "It was very wrong of my sister to come in, and, of course, she must retire again immediately. But I really must insist again that we are at a crisis when only calm deliberation can save us from——"

"Calm? How can I be calm?" The leopard began to pace the floor again with redoubled fury. "You don't know what I've had to put up with, in your kingdom—*my* kingdom! I've loathed that man Rohan ever since I set eyes on him. My mother warned me against him, when the Dubarry creature had him sent as ambassador to Vienna. A pretty ambassador for France! His Excellency the Peeping Tom of Paris. His Sublimity the Satyr of Strasbourg—if he could get a nymph to look twice at him! Three years ago I had to dismiss my gate-keeper because this filthy rogue had bribed him and sneaked into Trianon—*my* Trianon!—after dark. And now this! Love-letters! Assignations! A trumpery necklace! Oh, why can't you get out of the room?" She had advanced upon Elizabeth, with blazing eyes; then she turned away, marched to the window and stood looking out, her back turned to the company, her shoulders shaking with emotion.

Poor Louis glanced desperately at M. De Calonne and the other minister who stood by the table, looking tactfully down their noses: he made a clumsy signal to his sister. Elizabeth was already walking towards the door, realising that there were times when even Mass must be postponed. But as she grasped the handle she heard a sudden sob from the window, and saw Marie-Antoinette put both her elbows against the window-panes and lean her forehead against her crossed forearms.

"Send those two men away," whispered the Queen, "and tell Elizabeth to stay."

Elizabeth stayed, longing to cross the room and take Marie-Antoinette in sisterly arms. King Louis cleared his throat, looked miserably at his ministers, and then said: "If you would retire now—I am very grateful for the advice you have given, and"—he glanced towards the window—"it is more than likely that we shall follow it. Meanwhile the Queen . . . as you see . . ."

His voice trailed away; the two men bowed themselves out of the room. Marie-Antoinette, alone with her husband and sister, showed no sign of the expected collapse, the appeal to womanly sympathy. She dropped her arms to her sides, and lifted her head to stare proudly out at the long valley of garden

and lake that had been the creation of a more imperious Louis than her husband. "So you are going to take their advice?" she said, without turning.

"Well, really, my dear . . ." King Louis dropped back into his chair and sat fumbling with the papers on the table, his eyes on Elizabeth. "Things are pretty serious, you know. The Crown compromised, the door open to every scandal. . . . I really cannot see that we can do anything safely, except hush the whole matter up—at whatever price. That is M. De Calonne's opinion, and I really think——" He picked up a letter, and held it a few inches from his nose. "I mean, things like this——" he began, and was lost in what he read.

"May I know what all this is about?" asked Elizabeth, a trifle primly.

"Well, it's immensely complicated," began her brother, "so complicated that I can only tell you the main point——"

"And the main point is," interrupted Marie-Antoinette, "that the Cardinal Bishop of Rohan, Grand Almoner to this Court, is a fool, a rogue and a lecher!"

"Please, please!" Louis dreaded a return to emotional tempests. His slow, diffident, but by no means contemptible brain was still struggling to assimilate and re-arrange, in some manageable pattern, the myriad astounding facts he had been asked to swallow in the course of the last twenty-four hours. It was desperately necessary for him to get them straight in his own mind, as he might well do by explaining them to his sister. Perhaps—given quiet and a sympathetic audience—there was no man who could sum up more justly than King Louis the suddenly-revealed tangle of evidence that now threatened to become a net capacious and deadly enough to strangle his honour, his marriage and his kingdom.

"Toinette is right," he said, "or partly right, in what she says. This Rohan fellow has been deliberately making love to her—or thinking he was making love—for the past three years. A gang of criminals has been inducing him to write letters to her, feeding his treasonable hopes, and answering with other letters—the clumsiest of forgeries—which purport to come from my wife. They even got a woman of the streets . . . what is the name? D'Oliva . . . a prostitute, since we

are speaking so plainly, to masquerade as the Queen in the Park here one night. Of course, no one but a criminal fool would have been taken in for an instant. But they only gave Rohan an instant: they interrupted him before she could do more than whisper a word, and drop a flower at his precious feet . . . I am sorry, my dear, but——”

“Go on,” said Marie-Antoinette, “you are not telling her half—but go on.”

“Who paid them for all this?” asked Madame Elizabeth. Her mind flew to ugly tales she had heard, of campaigns against the Throne that were financed by cousin Orléans, even by her brothers D’Artois and Provence.

“The Cardinal himself. He paid them thousands,” said Louis. “The money was supposed to be going to Toinette, or to charities she had at heart.”

“To me!” said the Queen fiercely. “To buy me as any young waster could buy the D’Oliva for a night! Who made this creature a Bishop?”

“I am afraid, my dear,” said King Louis reluctantly, “that his money and his family made him a Bishop. And if we expose him now, his money and his family—the whole army of the Rohans—will be added to our enemies. M. De Calonne says——”

“I have heard what M. De Calonne says!” interrupted Marie-Antoinette, “and I am prepared to fight him and you and the Rohans together, rather than let you hush things up—and let them leak out, garbled and distorted, to ruin my reputation for ever. I want France and the world to know the Truth. And I have a right to ask that of you, both as Queen and wife.”

King Louis sighed, and looked for sympathy to his sister before he spoke again. “I think, my dear,” he said, “that you under-estimate the power of Money. It is Money, if we antagonise it, that will garble and distort whatever truth a King may try to proclaim. It’s not merely the newspapers—though they are bad enough, and get worse every day. It’s . . . it’s . . .” He waved a hand in pathetic impotence. “Money,” he repeated miserably. “The Bishop, of course, will be financially ruined by this necklace business. But his

friends are still rich. And if we try to expose him, we'll have thousands of new enemies. Everyone that's been working against us since our accession, everyone who makes it his business to misrepresent the good we try to do, and exaggerate our mistakes. Foreign agents—the men Frederick of Prussia pays to counter what he calls Austrian influence—your influence: the men England sends over in the hope of revenge for Yorktown. Sedition-mongers among our own people, whose idea of Liberty is . . . well you know what I mean! Oh, yes, anti-clericals will back a Bishop like Rohan against a King! My own kith and kin . . .” He stopped wearily. “Are you prepared to give them all a chance of uniting against us?”

Marie-Antoinette seemed to hesitate a moment. She turned away again, tapping with her foot. “Yes,” she said.

“You haven't told me about the necklace,” said Elizabeth. “What necklace do you mean?”

“*The necklace*,” began the Queen firmly, “the one Boehmer and Bassange made, and no one could afford to buy. And just because I used to be rather fond of jewellery, just because it suits some people to call me a spendthrift——”

Her voice died away, and King Louis was left to finish the sentence. “This villain Rohan took it on himself to pledge her credit—the credit of France—to the poor jewellers, and take the necklace from them. That was how we first heard of it. Believe it or not, this thing has been going on for three years, and 'Toinette had no inkling of it, not an inkling, until a few weeks ago: and then Boehmer and Bassange wrote a note to 'Toinette, asking for the next instalment of the money that Rohan had promised them in her name! He'd paid the first instalment out of his own pocket.”

“And I threw their note into the fire,” said Marie-Antoinette. “I was rehearsing for *Figaro* at Trianon when it arrived. I thought that they had just gone mad or something. I never dreamt——”

“And the Necklace?” asked Madame Elizabeth. “What has happened to the Necklace?”

“It's in London or Amsterdam,” said Louis. “The rogues are selling it stone by stone. They made the Bishop get it from the jeweller's: they took it from him, saying that they were

going to take it to 'Toinette . . . and I suppose they had their passports made out already. A certain Madame De La Motte . . . I seem to remember, my dear, that there was a person of that name hanging around Versailles these last few years, and pretending she had the *entrée* to the Palace. . . . She has managed to escape abroad and sell . . .”

“How much of the money is she sending back here—to Saverne?” asked Marie-Antoinette savagely.

“Please, please!” King Louis was clearly pained. “We have no evidence, 'Toinette, that the Bishop has made a penny out of the affair. As I said just now, he is more likely to have ruined himself by his criminal folly . . . if he is not already ruined by becoming the dupe of that man Cagliostro. We certainly can't tell, from what we have discovered, how far he is financially implicated.”

“And we never shall be able to,” answered the Queen, “unless you disregard your wonderful M. De Calonne's advice, and have a public enquiry! No, I'm not losing my temper again. I am quite calm now. All that you say about Slander and Money may be true, but it'll be worse, ten times worse, if the thing isn't thrashed out here and now! If you stand up to slander, you'll get Truth in the end—even if it takes a hundred years. If you run away from it, I'm branded for ever as . . . as . . . as . . . God knows what they'll say of me!”

The King did not move. Already the suave tones of his ministers were ringing less persuasively in his ears. Already he was looking with admiration at the Queen. But he still scratched his head, still fidgeted uneasily on the little gilt chair. .

“I don't see how we can do it,” he said in perplexity. “The moment we order an Enquiry, Rohan will be off to Saverne, where he's practically an independent Prince—everything about Alsace is so complicated; I sometimes doubt if I'm really King there. No, it's more probable he'll go abroad. He'll go to Berlin and help Frederick turn this into a European scandal—anything to weaken France. And I couldn't touch him there.”

“There's a remedy for that,” said Marie-Antoinette imperiously. “You are still King in Versailles.”

She marched to the table and picked up her pen. For a

moment there was silence, save for the scratching on the paper. Then King Louis rose and walked over to his sister.

"From what you've heard," he said, "and I still say it is only a small part of this wretched business—would you be inclined to agree with Toinette or with M. De Calonne?"

Again there was silence. The whole Palace seemed to have fallen still. Outside in the corridors, the nobility of France stood ranked in cynical and yawning splendour, awaiting this tedious Mass. There were few among them but had been long trained in the taking of the easier way and would not have hesitated as Madame Elizabeth was hesitating: there was hardly one that would have counselled the bold stroke as she counselled it.

"Toinette," she said, and looked her brother in the face.

He turned away from her, his mind clouded and diffident again. All his chivalry, all his good-nature, was urging him to do as his women demanded. He had half forgotten that he was a King, and unable to afford chivalry. He had half forgotten the uglinesses from which Circumstance had sheltered these two dearly-loved ones, but which it was his business to remember. M. De Calonne might have reminded him, but M. De Calonne was gone. The minister had seen clearly, had even tactfully hinted, that no King could allow a certain question to be asked—as it would be asked at a public enquiry and at a thousand drawing-rooms, coffee-houses and street corners. France would have to choose between two things: she would either have to believe that her Queen, already smirched with every kind of scandal, had fallen to adultery and theft, or to believe that a man against whom nothing was known, a man of position, wealth and power, had for three years been acting with an idiocy that passed all belief. And if the King had any doubts about France's choice, M. De Calonne was not so easily deceived.

Some memory of his minister's clear vision lingered in King Louis' mind. He shambled towards his wife, stood leaning heavily on the table. "And you're sure," he said, "that you want me to——"

"I am wanting you to sign this," she said, pushing across the paper she had written. "I am demanding it—as my right."

He peered at it, opened his eyes in astonishment and then recognised its necessity—since she must have her way. He thought for a moment, then drew himself erect. He took up a little silver handbell, shook it with nervous loudness, and bent to take up the pen.

His Chamberlain entered, eager at the long-delayed summons.

"Tell M. De Rohan," said King Louis, "that his presence is required here immediately. He will not be saying Mass to-day."

"Not be——?" the Chamberlain was brought up short, and stared round the room in perplexity—at Madame Elizabeth's inscrutable simplicity, at the bright eyes of the angry Queen.

The King handed him the paper. "See that a guard is ready," he said, "to convey M. De Rohan under preventive arrest, honourable arrest, to the Bastille—in ten minutes' time."

CHAPTER FOUR

FALSE DAWN (1788-1789)

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THE NOONDAY SUN ROSE HIGH OVER FINLAND, but King Gustav was still asleep. He lay twisted upon a bed of straw in the little cottage that served him for quarters: only three men were with him, his three most faithful followers. His uniform was crumpled and stained, there were dark rings about his eyes, and deep furrows on his crooked brow. His breath rose and fell uneasily; even in sleep he seemed to struggle with exhaustion and despair.

Through the little window above him peered the dark fir-trees of Kymmenegard, brooding mournfully over a land at war. Fersen, sitting upright in a roughly-carved chair, could not see more than their heads. The cheerful little lakes at their feet were hidden from him, the myriad islets feathered with silver birch and smiling in the August heat; he could only see the sleeping King and the black forest against a mocking, hard-blue sky.

On a low stool by the bed sat Mauritz Armfelt—a soldierly but a crestfallen Armfelt, with all his impudence forgotten. He had done well in the first days of the campaign, but his further ambitions had now vanished down the wind. His beautiful face was turned in friendship and pity towards the King. "So this is the end," he said.

Hans Essen, the third man in the room, raised his head to nod agreement, and then buried his chin in his cupped hands again. Essen had long ago recovered from the wound that had snapped Count Ribbing's desperate sword-blade: he had married Charlotta De Geer: he was his dapper self, a King's equerry, a keen soldier, though perhaps with more knowledge of parades than War. Essen was generally talkative enough, even when there were no ladies about. He had fallen silent now. Things must be far gone when the dashing Essen had no word to say.

He sat with elbows planted on the rough-hewn table, at which unknown generations of Finnish farmers had gathered

for their meals—at which farmers would be gathering again soon, when the captains and the kings had departed. It was littered with papers now, reports of discontent and disobedience, despatches with news of defeat, vain orders to officers who were in mutiny or treason. Buried beneath them were the high-flown plans of a month ago, maps of St. Petersburg, and schemes for smoking the Tsarina out of her own capital, while the Turks attacked her from the South. They were better buried. The Tsarina was no longer straining her ears for the sound of Swedish guns. She sat reading letters from Swedish colonels who would rather betray all Finland to her than march their regiments in obedience to King Gustav's plans. Apart from the three men that sat with him in the cottage kitchen, there was hardly an officer in his army on whom he could rely.

"I do not think it is the end yet," said Fersen suddenly. "While he is alive, he will always have some trick that no one else can think of."

"Trick?" said Armfelt. "What makes you use that word?"

"You should know," answered Fersen. "You've helped him trick Sweden into obeying him for sixteen years."

"It is easy to see," said Armfelt bitterly, "that you are your father's son. If it's all tricks to you, I suppose you can find excuses for those mutinous swine in the camps. I suppose there'll be rejoicing at Blasieholm, when they've forced him to go back to Stockholm and eat humble-pie to a Riksdag."

Fersen did not move: he only clasped the arms of his chair more tightly. "I am a soldier and a Swede," he said. "If I were a politician with a grievance against my King, I should keep it until the War was over. My father has never had any truck with traitors. And I still say that King Gustav will know how to beat the mutineers without eating humble-pie to anyone."

"We could do it now!" said Hans Essen savagely. "We could get Petersburg if we could find a few fresh officers. The men were cheering him yesterday. They'd follow him to Hell if their damned colonels and captains would let them."

"Not so loud," said Armfelt softly. "Let him sleep while he can." He turned back to the bed. King Gustav shifted his position a little, sighing like a tired child, and then huddled his head into his arms again.

Silence fell in the cottage. The flies were buzzing at the window. Distant waters tinkled softly, and, from far off, came the faint sound of an axe thudding into a pine-tree.

"They've no right, even," said Essen again, "to accuse him of provoking the war. There was no other way of breaking the slavery their fathers imposed on Sweden, and making her great again—if they want her to be great! And for all we know, it may have been the only thing he could do—instead of waiting till Russia was ready to smash us and make us slaves again."

"There's so much they don't know," agreed Armfelt, "so much that none of us know. No one could count the threads that met only in his hand."

Fersen pursed his lips. It had long been an axiom at Blasieholm that Gustav tried to hold too many threads in his own hand. Perhaps he had only gone to war to prevent the tangled skein from tightening and throttling his power. One needed no more to account for his present plight, unless it was the inflamed imagination that had made him want to add 'soldier' to the hundred other parts he had acted. His performance had been creditable enough, in the despising of hardship and even bullets. If the scene he must now play did less credit to his foresight—and less still to the honour of his officers—Fersen had an obstinate faith that it need not end in the *débâcle* that the other two thought so inevitable.

By whatever means, whether he deserved to or not, Gustav must survive and play the King again. All Europe needed kings, to save her from chaos and destruction—not honest, well-meaning kings like Louis, but ingenious, crafty, unscrupulous kings who could teach each other by what questionable shifts their thrones could be maintained. One might lament the low pitch to which the sin and recklessness of their predecessors had brought the grandeur of kingship, but, low or high, it was every man's duty to support it against the shapeless threat of the new follies.

There were clumsy steps in the passage and a knocking at the door. Essen rose to open it; a dusty despatch-rider pushed past him into the room. He saw the King asleep and threw down his letter on the table.

"From Stockholm," he said. "You gentlemen had better wake him at once."

"That is for us to decide," said Armfelt in quiet anger. "Who told you to give us orders?"

The man looked momentarily sheepish, and then remembered that he was in the presence of defeat—such defeat as could hardly enforce respect.

"I'm only doing as I was told," he said sulkily. "They said the King must read it at once."

He turned back for the door, but stood waiting to see what they would do.

"If it were good news," said Armfelt to Essen, "I'd wake him now. But he's better sleeping than hearing of more trouble." He turned sharply to the messenger. "You come from Stockholm," he said. "Do you know what's in your despatch?"

"I can guess. If my guess is right, you'd, maybe, like to let him sleep a long time before he reads it."

Armfelt took a step forward as if to strike him across the face. Then he, too, remembered, and stood still. "What is it?" he said. "What has happened?"

"I only said I could guess," said the man, narrowing his eyes. "You gentlemen know how folk talk in Stockholm. But they say now that it isn't only Russia the King's making us fight. Denmark has declared war on us!"

Armfelt stood rigid for a moment, and then his knees doubled up and he staggered back upon his stool, burying his face in his hands.

"You may go!" said Essen to the messenger, but with a gesture that lacked conviction. As the man leered and departed, Essen shuffled to the table and leant on it with his two hands. "What do you say now?" he asked Fersen, almost in a whisper.

Fersen said nothing. There was a long silence. If Armfelt's shoulders seemed once to heave, there was no sound of a sob.

When he spoke at last it was with a dry, cold voice. "Ring down the curtain," he said. "*La farce est jouée*. Nothing matters any more."

"They may not attack just yet." Essen was struggling with his own desperation. "They're slow movers in Denmark. And they've no ships to speak of."

"Fast or slow," said Armfelt, "they can make an end of us." He rose miserably and walked to a map on the wall. "They don't even need ships," he said. "Norway's theirs, and they've an army there that could be in Göteborg in a week—in Stockholm before two months are out. Who's to stop them, if the army won't fight? I tell you it's the end."

He threw a glance at Fersen, as though challenging him now to contradict. Fersen sat rigid, still gripping the arms of his chair. There was no more to be said, no more that anyone could do.

It was Essen that broke the silence. He had picked up the letter, and was balancing it in his hand, as though longing to tear it in pieces. "There's only one hope," he said. "That scoundrel may be lying. Why don't we have him back and order him a flogging?" He threw down the letter, glowering at the door, and silence descended again.

"I shouldn't do that!"

All three men turned in surprise to see that King Gustav had spoken. His eyes were open, and something like a smile was dawning on his drawn face. He sat up on the straw, almost impish in spite of his exhaustion.

"I shouldn't have him flogged," he repeated. "He'd forgotten his manners, but he brings good news."

"Good news?" Essen could hardly believe his ears. "Did Your Majesty overhear what he said?"

"Oh, yes! I haven't been sleeping as soundly as my good Mauritz would like. I say again, 'Good news'."

Armfelt and Essen stood gaping. Fersen rose, equally incredulous. The crowning misfortune must have turned the King's brain.

"Long Axel," said Gustav, "will be able to go back to France sooner than we thought. We may find things getting more important there than in Sweden."

Armfelt was the only one to find a tongue, and that a foolish one. "Is Your Majesty wise to get up?" he stammered. "A little more rest——"

"Rest!" For the first time the King's eyes flashed fire. "There'll be no rest for any of us now! Do you know what happens when a country's invaded? It rises and fights. If the army has mutinied and won't do its duty, so much the worse for the army! Sweden's still Sweden, whatever her rich men have become. We'll have the peasants out, we'll make the tradesmen march! Not that they'll need much making! God, Mauritz, can't you see it? The country in danger, the old enemy daring to cross the frontier! They'll forget they ever grumbled at me; they'll even forget I tried to tax their liquor! They'll cheer my footmen, and lynch every one that talks of making peace—let alone the officers that are jingling Russian roubles in their pockets! We can do what we like now, God bless the Danes for it! Unless——"

He jumped up and ran to the table. He tore open the letter with trembling fingers, and ran a feverish eye along the pages. "The man was right," he said exultantly. "War declared and invasion from Norway expected. How soon can we make a start? How soon can we see the last of Finland?"

"Your Majesty is so excited," began Essen. "A little reflection——"

"Damn your reflection!" said Gustav. "I've been waiting for this for weeks. I've got another lease of life and I'm not going to waste it in reflecting." There was, indeed, a new light in his eye, a new energy in his cramped limbs. If King Gustav was mad, it was with a madness that might work the needed miracle. "What about horses?" he was saying. "I want to start to-night."

"Your Majesty," began Armfelt, "in the state we're in at present——"

"What do you mean by that?" Gustav shouted him down. "Do you mean that my uniform's dirty? So much the better! I must arrive in Stockholm looking like a tattered veteran. No,

better still, Mauritz, I'll change clothes with you, and swear we had to do it so that I shouldn't be kidnapped by the mutinous colonels as I rode home to rescue Sweden from the Danish ogres! I'm going to teach my officers their duty! I'll make it unsafe for any of them to show his face in Stockholm streets!"

"If Your Majesty intends to excite feeling——" said Fersen.

"I do!" interrupted Gustav. "I intend to be King again, not a plaything for aristocrats in uniform. I'll have a Riksdag all right, but I'll not eat humble-pie to it: the House of Peers can do as I tell it, or get pulled to pieces by a mob. I've tried to rule through aristocrats for fifteen years, and at the end of it there are only you three donkeys that aren't trying to sell me to Russia, or stab me in the back. I'm going to be the People's King now, leader of the Unwigged and the Unwashed! I told you to go back to France, Axel. You may be loyal, but I'll never persuade my Stockholmers of it. They'll want to burn down Blasieholm and chase your family out of Sweden. . . . Go and see about those horses, Hans. No, I'll go myself. Mauritz, I shall want a suit of your clothes, the dirtiest you can get me. I must be dressed for the part when I enter as King of the mob."

He grew a little quieter when it came to actual plans, but he was already infecting Armfelt and Essen with his sudden hope. If much of it was exaggeration and folly, they had often before seen Gustav make folly and exaggeration do sober wisdom's work. Only Fersen refused to catch the contagion, standing a little part and gazing out of the window at the mournful trees. When the other two had been despatched on their errands, he prepared to take his leave.

King Gustav had fallen silent, poring over the maps. His manner seemed suddenly calmer, as though he knew what the remnant of his audience required.

"You've been very silent, Axel," he said. "You don't think I can save the country?"

"I know so little of Sweden; I have been away so long."

"I know it well and can answer for my success. Do you doubt it, Axel?"

"It might be truer to say that I feared it."

"I do not understand that—unless you are still bearing me the Fersen grudge."

"I hope not, Your Majesty. But when kings court mobs, one does not have to be a Fersen to wonder what the end will be."

II

IN A SMALL ROOM AT TRIANON a priest was conferring with an agent of Austria in the Queen's private rooms.

It was perhaps well for Her Majesty that there were no newspaper men about to observe and broadcast the suspicious facts. Her Majesty, the majesty of the French monarchy would certainly suffer, were it known that her roof sheltered this sinister collaboration between the representatives of a foreign, possibly hostile, Power and of a Church rooted in superstition and intolerance. Luckily there was no one to know that M. Le Comte De Merci D'Argenteau was talking to the Abbé Vermond at Trianon.

He was Belgian by birth. He would have accepted the label 'Austrian', since he had been born in Belgium, a province of the Hapsburg Empire. He would have disliked the 'agent' as a travesty of his title as fully-accredited ambassador to the Court of France. He would certainly have repudiated the suggestion that his relations with the Queen were primarily governed by the Emperor's interests, were primarily political at all. He had known her since she could walk: he thought of her as any cultured and elderly gentleman might think of a niece or *protégée*. His place was to watch and advise her, with such worldly wisdom as he had at command, in the interests of France as well as Austria, in the interests of Europe and its civilisation. He had only discovered now that one piece of advice, given some years ago, had turned out less wise than he had thought it.

The Abbé Vermond had no such doubts. He, too, in spite of far humbler origins than the Count's, had known the Archduchess Maria Antoinetta as a child in Vienna. He had been appointed her tutor, so soon as it was decided that she would go to France as bride to the Dauphin. He had found her uneducated, though able to speak a little French. He had taught her a little more, but, faced with her physical energy, her dislike of books, her reluctance to concentrate on anything at

all, he had soon thrown up the sponge and left her ignorance unspotted with any tincture of learning. He had succeeded in one thing: he had made himself pleasant, in his homely way, preserved a place about Court, and imagined himself to have kept a certain influence. If he was angry now, if he defied all Count Merci D'Argenteau's efforts to soothe him, it was because that influence had suddenly proved a great deal less powerful than he had thought it.

"An affront to both of us," he repeated. "No wonder Her Majesty is keeping us waiting here. She will hardly dare to grant us an audience at all, after countenancing this triumph of our enemies. I feel it more deeply than you can, M. Le Comte. M. Loménie De Brienne has been my patron, I think I may say my friend—ever since he became a Bishop, when I was friendless and obscure. I hoped to repay him—and to do France a service—by securing him the opportunity he deserved, to exercise his influence as Minister. I felt he was the one man, for instance, who could deal with the situation caused by this wretched business of the Necklace, which M. De Calonne mismanaged so hopelessly. If M. De Brienne had had the handling of it from the first——"

"I do not know what you mean," cut in Count Merci, "by saying that Calonne mismanaged the affair."

The interruption only served to add fuel to the Abbé's excitement. "You would know what I mean," he answered in anger, "if you had seen what I saw on the last day of the Enquiry. Cheering crowds, the streets black with people, escorting the Cardinal from the Bastille to the judgment hall, and to welcome him with frenzy when he was acquitted. And you know perfectly well, M. Le Comte, what that acquittal meant. It was a verdict of 'Guilty' on the Queen, a sentence of perpetual infamy. They even cheered Cagliostro and Madame de La Motte, shouted that she was an innocent victim, condemned to prison in order to hide the Queen's fraud and adultery. Public Enquiry indeed! Public Travesty of Justice! Public Surrender to whatever the newspaper men cared to print, the enemies of Monarchy to insinuate!"

Count Merci looked guardedly at the strutting priest: he knew too much to refute him by the simple truth, but he could

not forbear from a hint at its nature. "And you blame all this on M. De Calonne?" he asked.

"Naturally, naturally!" The Abbé clasped and unclasped his hands behind his indignant back. "That was one of my motives, though not the only one, in working for a change of Minister. It was my clear duty to assist you, M. Le Comte, in getting rid of such a plausible bungler as M. Calonne. It was our common privilege to help M. Loménie De Brienne to a place where his talents could be of service to France. And now after a paltry four years of unfair trial, of coping with Calonne's legacy of follies, everything is to be thrown away by this infamous dismissal."

He beat on the mantelpiece again and stumped to the sunlit window. M. D'Argenteau shrugged his shoulders without audible reply: only a very acute ear could have heard his muttered repetition of "Talents!" In spite of considerable discomfort in his own mind, he could not help being amused at the Abbé's self-opinionated vehemence.

"I am sure of one thing," continued Vermond, his back turned to the room. "I am sure this would never have happened but for Madame De Polignac and her clique. She is supposed to have cured the Dauphin's rickets: some quack in her employ has made it possible for him to sleep in bed—for the moment—instead of on a billiard-table. She has ousted Madame De Lamballe from favour again on the strength of that. But I cannot see that that entitles her to appoint and dismiss the King's ministers!" Words seemed to fail the good Abbé. He turned, sank down on the window-seat, and ran his twitching hand over his shaven bullet-head. "And who," he asked with a final spurt of desperation, "who do they think they can find to take M. De Brienne's place?"

There was a momentary silence. The August sun streamed into the room. A bee banged against the window-pane with unwary head and departed grumbling into infinity. Then a cool breeze set the trees rustling, flooded the ante-room with the first promise of evening freshness.

M. D'Argenteau did not move. He did not even look at the Abbé. When he spoke at last it was in a tone more courteous than his words. "You give me two problems to consider," he

said. "The cure of rickets may be a poor claim to politic power, but what exactly entitles *us* to appoint or dismiss ministers? And secondly, I am wondering whether your last question, the question of M. De Brienne's successor, is not great deal more interesting than all the rest of your discourse put together."

He raised a white, slim hand, enjoining silence again probable expostulation. "It may have been a good thing," he said, "for France to be rid of a man in whom you can see only plausible bungler. But there are a large number of intelligent Frenchmen who regard our M. De Brienne as no improvement. They think we saddled them with a bungler who is not even plausible. And I would not like to take my oath that they are wrong. His Majesty tells me——"

"His Majesty," interrupted Vermond, unable to restrain himself longer, "has been prejudiced against M. De Brienne from the beginning. When it was proposed to transfer him from Toulouse to the Archbishopric of Paris——"

"His Majesty," the Count interrupted in his turn, "was naturally prejudiced in favour of Christian faith and some attempt at Christian morals, in the proposed Archbishop. As a priest, you can hardly grumble at that. As courtiers, as politicians, we decided that these things do not necessarily impede a Minister's effectiveness—even a Minister called upon (as you have reminded me) to deal with such scandals as that of the Diamond Necklace. Perhaps we were right. Perhaps one might find a great statesman in the merest debauchee, inshall we say?—this Mirabeau creature, whose disreputable exploits seem to be amusing Paris so much. But such a man would surely have to have some qualities to counterbalance his immoralities. And I am beginning to think, whatever you may say, I am beginning to think that his Grace of Toulouse has never had sufficient qualities to counterbalance a mild evening at the card-table." He rose, slender and all the more impressive by the humility his words implied. He dominated the cocksure little priest. "I must repeat," he said, "that only one thing matters now. To whom will Their Majesties turn for advice? Who will be foisted upon them—since they never seem to trust their own judgment—in place of the

incompetent charlatan we recommended them four years ago?"

The Abbé rolled his eyes round the room and rose to take his departure. "I have been feeling for some time," he said, "that I was wasting my time by staying here. I am sure Her Majesty will be unwilling to receive either of us, having injured us as she has. And I am certainly not going to wait any longer if it involves listening to this—to a gentleman whom I admire and respect abandoning every principle we once held in common."

He achieved some kind of dignity on his last sentence, gathered up his hat, and walked out of the ante-room.

IT HAD BEEN A HOT DAY, even for August, and His Majesty King Louis was unusually subject to heat. He had always been a good trencherman, but his recent performances at the dinner-table had been even more surprising than usual. They had given him temporary lethargies to dull his already slow-moving wits: he neglected, or rather ignored business to such an extent that the malicious said he must be drinking—when they should have said he was eating.

His traducers did not realise that there might be other reasons for his neglect, for this blunting of his youthful eagerness (even the slow can be eager) to rule France for the good of the French. It did not occur to them that certain misunderstandings can dull any edge, and discourage the best of intentions. For it is undoubtedly discouraging to know that one is spoken of as an obstacle or a clog upon the wheels of Progress, merely because one can see the difference between rose-coloured Theory and muddy Practice. It is still more sharply discouraging to find that the creature one loves best in the world is generally believed—merely because a fool she disliked has succumbed to rogues she never heard of—to be a jewel-thief as well as a harlot.

He was not thinking of the Diamond Necklace now. He was thinking of the heat, the number of stags he had helped to kill, and the fact that his saddle seemed unusually uncomfortable. He had already dismounted, was already hoping for a rest—possibly a nap under the trees of the Meudon forest—when the courier rode up from Versailles. More despatches, more

business. The courier could not even say that it was urgent. But with M. Loménie De Brienne dismissed, and his successor not yet appointed, nervous clerks had a way of impinging upon the Royal recreation on the slightest excuse. Louis sighed, tried to wipe his running forehead without removing his hat, and swung his leg over the equally sweating horse. He took the bulky packet to a little knoll under the ash-trees, sat down and tried not to nod over the contents.

He had little difficulty in keeping awake. He read, in his slow way, for the better part of an hour. But when the full hour was gone, and M. De Lambesc approached tactfully to see whether Majesty were sleeping, Majesty was found in an attitude of unexampled dejection. M. De Lambesc had to acknowledge that evening that, when King Louis said "Leave me alone!" and lifted his eyes towards his fellow-huntsman, they were filled with unmistakable tears.

They could not leave him alone for ever. Evening was coming on, and the dew would soon begin to fall. They had to take him back in a carriage. They talked about uncomfortable saddles, about heat and apoplexy. M. De Lambesc kept his counsel for the moment, but he was longing to break all rules and glance through the bundle of papers he had picked up round the roots of the ash-tree. He did not do so, self-control being stronger than curiosity. But he was interested to hear the King mutter something about Sweden, about it being a good thing that the Northern war kept someone away from France.

"I'M GLAD YOU WAITED," said Marie-Antoinette to Count Merci, "though I suppose you've come to scold me. I suppose Joseph has sent you to say that I've hindered his schemes for mankind by allowing my husband to dismiss M. De Brienne?"

"Your Majesty supposes wrong," said the Count De Merci. "While I was waiting for this audience I managed to rid Trianon of the Abbé Vermond, the only man who wanted to start scolding. And His Imperial Majesty has sent me no instructions on the subject of the change in the French Ministry."

"Well, that's something, anyhow!" Marie-Antoinette walked to the spinet that stood in the corner of her boudoir and sat down upon its three-legged stool. "Are you fond of M. Gluck's music?" she asked. "I like to think that I discovered him—or at least gave him his chance in a jealous world." She struck a few loud chords and then let her hands drop into the lap.

"I like any music when Your Majesty sings it."

"Be careful, Count. You generally flatter before you lecture me." She began playing again, more softly, and spoke over her shoulder through the music. "Not that I should listen to a lecture to-day," she said. "I feel too happy. Louis has made up his mind about De Brienne's successor. We've both made up our minds. We're going to put our pride in our pocket and do as we're told—not by our friends and flatterers, Count, not by Imperial Majesties and Brother Josephs with half an eye on the Scheldt and half an eye on Austrian trade. We're going to do what France tells us, the intelligent France, the France of the future. I've begun economising already at the expense of my old parasites. Coigny made a scene, Besenval has gone off with a flea in his ear and Diane De Polignac has been screeching like a peacock—I mean pea-hen—at the places and pensions we've made her friends disgorge! I'll never call anyone my friend again who comes to beg off me. I've always preferred foreigners, Belgains and . . . well, foreigners, because they aren't always asking me for slices of French revenue, posts at the Court of France. Do you know this tune? It isn't Gluck this time, but it's very pretty." She bent her auburn head over the keys, then raised it to sing full-throated:

"When my beloved comes again
To cheer my longing heart."

He said no more, applauding her songs and forgetting that he had ever spoken to her of Ministers. He was not quite sure who it was to whom she had suddenly decided to entrust France. There were several possibilities, all of which might give her this sudden sense of having shifted an intolerable responsibility from her puzzled shoulders. He knew it was his

duty to find out, to report swiftly to Vienna what steps might be needed to maintain or increase Austrian influence with this or that faction in power. He neglected his duty, or thought it beyond his power to discharge. She was not communicative: she was merely care-free, if only for a few days, perhaps a few hours. If someone was coming to kiss her hand, her husband's hand and present himself as their future Minister, the mere sight of him might bring her to sobriety and unhappiness again. Meanwhile the Count Merci D'Argenteau was merely the benevolent uncle, glad to watch his niece at play. Nor did it matter much if her playfulness was heightened by the reception of news from a distant theatre of war, the expectation that a certain soldier would soon be returning to the country that was dearer to him than his own.

Her spirits were not even dashed by the King's return, by the summons to meet the invalid up at the Palace of Versailles nor (when Merci D'Argenteau had driven her there in the ambassadorial coach) by her hasty perusal of the papers that M. De Lambesc handed to her before he said good night.

"The old story," she said to Louis, "the old, old story! It won't matter now what they think of me. I'm only going to be the ornamental Queen who has entrusted the government to more hopeful hands. I rather doubt whether you'll be more than an ornamental King, for a year or two at any rate. Let your new minister make a few mistakes before you begin to interfere with his schemes. I must say, you don't look as though you wanted to interfere with anyone at present. I believe all you want is some supper!"

The King's eye gleamed momentarily. It was cooler now and he was undeniably hungry. But he wanted her first to set his mind at rest on a thing or two. They were alone as soon as she had rung for the meal and given orders for a plentiful one.

"Did you see," he said, "did you see what they said about . . ."

"About Axel?" she asked cheerfully. "Yes, I suppose that's new—or new to them. They had to find someone, now I've packed Besenval off and am no longer supposed to be having affairs with that beast of a Cardinal." She grew graver for the moment. There was a suspicion of a break in her voice. "I

suppose," she said, "that they will take away from us the one disinterested friend we have, the one man that you and I can count on. But we'll outface them yet. We'll put an end to their intrigues, one way or another."

M. DE MERCI D'ARGENTEAU was slow to be gone. He knew the value of ceremony, the importance of an ambassador taking his time about everything he did in public. He had hardly finished his compliments to the aristocratic do-nothings who still held overpaid posts at Versailles, he had not yet stepped into his coach, when another carriage rattled over the Place D'Armes, passed the gilded gateway and came to a halt in the Royal Courtyard. M. D'Argenteau had little difficulty in recognising it or in guessing upon what errand its owner came. He congratulated himself on restraining his curiosity before Marie-Antoinette: he would now be able to report to her brother—and without unmannerly questioning—who was about to succeed the discarded Loménie De Brienne.

The new Minister was M. Jacques Necker, late of Thelusson and Necker, Bankers; and he was already planning the regeneration of France by a mixture of Philosophy and Juggling with High Finance.

III

'PEN QUYQUA,' THEY CALLED HIM IN GÖTEBORG, for his fellow-townsmen could never get tongue or pen round a name like P'ing Kai. Their inability was excusable, seeing that he was the only Chinaman that had ever lived in Sweden: it amused rather than annoyed him. He had even allowed the printers to put

PEN QUYQUA SWEDISH EAST INDIA COY.

on the little visiting-card that they told him was the fashion among Europeans. He was grasping such a card as he hurried through the rainy and deserted streets. He had hidden his pigtail under a wig, and donned his most uncomfortable coat with the gold-laced pockets. If he looked slightly absurd to the few that saw him pass, he was too much in earnest about his purpose to mind their ridicule.

He was proud to know that his name—or a substitute for it—was enrolled among those of the Free Burghers of Göteborg: he took the duties of his position very seriously, and was now on his way to the Governor's to suggest a plan for saving the city from capture. Europeans were so clever in the little things that did not matter, so curiously simple about the big ones that did. Of all their affairs, their wars, perhaps, were most foolishly and wastefully conducted. Göteborg was now menaced by war, and Herr Pen Quyqua was going to save it by carrying to its Governor a little of the wisdom of the East.

His welcome was an unexpected one. He had hardly turned the street corner and reached the big front door when it flew open in his face: but as soon as he tried to enter, he found his way blocked by a large dining-table that was travelling down the passage towards him on the backs of two sweating servants. They jostled him aside, carried their burden into the street and left it there, looking curiously forlorn on the dripping pavement.

P'ing Kai had grown used to being so frequently and so thoroughly astonished by the vagaries of Europeans, that he did not permit himself any great surprise at the idea of Herr Governor Durietz taking his dinner on the pavement. It was perhaps a Swedish custom for Governors to do so, in time of war; and war, as P'ing Kai's present errand witnessed, was approaching Göteborg with alarming speed.

He could get no answer to his polite knocking on the open door. The servants seemed all busy; some of them were carrying out elegant dining-chairs to keep the table company on the pavement. P'ing Kai made past them, turned through the first door on his right, and found himself in the Governor's office.

There were plenty of people in the room, fellow-merchants, soldiers—even two or three women, huddled in the bow-window and staring out into the street. In the middle of the room stood a bewildered corporal of the garrison, rolling his eyes round and seeming uncertain whether to laugh or cry. The Governor was talking at him in a voice that varied from the bully's rasp to the wheedling of a frightened dotard. Herr Governor Durietz was an old man with a grey wig and white, puffy cheeks. They were whiter than usual to-day, and one side of his face was twitching with nervous regularity.

"I'll open the gates to no one!" he was saying. "For all I know, the man's a Danish spy from Norway. I'm responsible for this town so long as I'm in it. When I'm gone, you can admit the Devil himself for all I care. Meanwhile you can keep the gate shut in this fellow's face. I told you so an hour ago."

"I beg Your Excellency's pardon," said the corporal. "I wouldn't have troubled Your Excellency if the man hadn't been so obstinate. He's been hollering at us from t'other side of the moat and telling us he's come with a message from the King."

"I'll wager it's the King of Denmark he comes from," said the Governor. "Our King's in the Dales, two hundred miles away. It's no good his sending messages unless he brings an army to stop these devils entering the town."

"No, sir." The corporal seemed to think it a good moment to salute. "But Colonel Fersen was telling us——"

"Colonel Fersen has no right to tell you anything!" shouted the Governor, as a tall, grey-eyed man stepped forward. P'ing Kai looked at him with momentary interest, and then decided that he was just another of the incomprehensible soldiers on whom Europe wasted its wealth and honours. The Governor had already turned angrily upon Fersen. "Are you Governor here or am I?" he demanded. "Am I supposed to be under your orders?"

"No, Your Excellency," said Axel. "I am only commissioned to assist you in defending the town." He was already wondering why King Gustav had not given him rather fuller powers. It was beginning to seem as if Göteborg needed an outsider with extremely full powers to save it from its own Governor. "But I still think," he added, "that we ought to examine this messenger's credentials."

"I can't examine anything without opening the gates," answered the Governor in a more plaintive tone. "And for all we know there are Danes or Norwegians ambushed outside to rush the town the moment they're ajar. You can never trust the Danes. . . . Good God! What's this yellow monkey doing in here?"

He had noticed P'ing Kai at last: for a moment he stood rooted to the floor. "I suppose you've come to assist in the defence too?"

"I sorry if I intrude," said the Chinaman. "I P'ing Kai, merchant of East India Company. I come to tell you——"

"All right, I've heard of you! And I've no wish to listen to what you've come to tell me. There's a Danish army on its way, my man, and I should advise you to trot home and bury all your tea-chests and ginger-pots in your cellar. You needn't think I can keep the Danes off with the few dozen rascals I'm allowed for garrison! I've got to go as soon as I can, so's to take the treasure and the archives out of harm's way. I daren't trust my own men to prevent them from being captured."

"I sorry if I intrude," repeated P'ing Kai. "I come to tell you how we save town. You stay here, open the gates, and make big——"

His voice was drowned by a sudden uproar of horse-hoofs

and cart-wheels on the cobbles outside. A huge waggon was rattling round the street corner and drawing up at the front door. P'ing Kai heard the servants come bumping down the passage behind him, presumably with new burdens for removal. The next moment the Governor had pushed him aside from the doorway and was striding out to superintend the furniture removal.

Fersen beckoned the corporal to him. "Why is this messenger waiting at the gate?" he asked. "From what I've seen of the town-walls, there are plenty of gaps he could come through."

The corporal saluted again with a nervous smile. "Maybe he wouldn't think of that," he said. "Maybe he's only a country fellow."

P'ing Kai approached them, with unruffled gravity. "Perhaps you will listen me," he said to Fersen. "When Governor gone, open town-gates, make big feast. Invite Danish princes and officers. I make big feast in East India House. Make them drunk—sick. Then we have men with knives to come in and——"

Fersen began to laugh. It seemed as if there must be comedy as well as tragedy in all King Gustav's wars, and a comedy that bordered on farce. He was still wondering if the reputed messenger was bringing him further orders, even a full commission, from the King.

"Is this man alone?" he asked the waiting servant.

"Yes, sir."

"What uniform?"

"Don't look like a uniform, sir. Dressed like the country people up in the Dales. We was told that they're recruiting the bumpkins up in the Dales, sir."

The corporal was right. Gustav had found a new part to play since he flitted with Armfelt from his mutinous army in Finland. He had made his entrance into Dalarne in the character of his own ancestor: Gustav Vasa, when Denmark threatened to overwhelm Sweden, had roused the sturdy Dalesmen, by speeches at Church or market-cross, to form an army against the ancient enemy. Rumour said that Gustav III was playing the same game, two hundred years out of time,

with tolerable success: that he already had 20,000 men to pick from. But it would take him many weeks to bring them to Göteborg, and, if Göteborg were not defended in the meantime, the Danes could be in it within as many days.

Certainly Herr Durietz was doing little enough to stop them. At the moment, he was merely cursing a footman for clumsy handling of a box containing his valuable French china. His only military preoccupation seemed to be that the invaders should find as little plunder as possible in the Governor's house. When he came back, it was to send the corporal packing and flop down into his chair.

"I don't know what all these people are doing here," he said, looking round at the crowded room. "I've told you all that it's not possible to defend this place. You'd better get home and thank God I'm saving you from unnecessary pillage. The war will be over in a couple of months, I expect. We certainly can't keep 'em off much longer."

"I came to ask," began a frightened little merchant in a snuff-coloured overcoat, "whether we would be able to follow Your Excellency southwards. There seems no point in staying——"

"I've got a guard on the south bridge," snapped his Excellency, "and it'll be there till midnight to prevent our retreat being cut off. If you care to follow me—— Good God! is this fellow still here?"

P'ing Kai had approached his chair. "I stay to ask about the feast," he said. "Herr Fersen not understand quite. We make big feast in East India House——"

Again he was interrupted, this time by a sound of cheering in the street.

"What is it?" asked Durietz, whiter than ever. "Are they attacking already?"

He rushed to the window, pushing the Chinaman aside. Fersen followed with a more dignified stride. It was easy for him to see over the cluster of heads that was gathering in the window space.

A single horseman was coming down the street, surrounded by a crowd of townsfolk and street-boys. He was mounted on a thick-shanked farm-horse. A Dale peasant, to judge by his

rain-soaked clothes, and certainly swaying in the saddle with desperate fatigue. He must have ridden his two hundred miles with little rest.

"Devil take them!" swore Herr Durietz. "Have they let the fellow in after all?"

The horseman drew rein, glanced up at the royal coat-of-arms above the door, and then at the furniture waggon standing with its wheels in the gutter. He swung a tired leg over the saddle and slipped to the ground among the crowd. As they parted to leave him an avenue to the door, Fersen saw that it was King Gustav himself.

A minute later he was in the room, leaning upon Fersen's shoulder. His peasant-dress was soiled and tattered, his knees sagging under him at the prospect of long-awaited rest.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Four o'clock, Your Majesty."

"Forty-eight hours—not counting the one that these fools left me shouting outside the moat. Two hundred and fifty miles. Not bad, considering the hailstorms—and half of it on cart-horses that I stole from farmers on the way."

"If Your Majesty thinks——" began Governor Durietz.

"I'm thinking of nothing except bed," said Gustav. "Have you one—or are they all in that furniture waggon? I could do with an hour of lying down while we discuss the defence of Göteborg."

THEY CLEARED THE ROOM of people and brought in a bed. Durietz was told to complete his preparations for departure and resign his royal governorship into the King's hands. Gustav, tired but triumphant, lay resting only his limbs; brain and tongue were busier than ever. Fersen and two secretaries could hardly cope with the flow of dictated orders and suggestions; every few minutes another messenger was sent to push his way through the huge crowd that now blocked the streets outside.

"I've brought no army," Gustav told them. "It'll be weeks before Mauritz can march my Dalesmen down. Göteborg is going to defend itself."

"There's no reason it shouldn't," said Fersen drily, "now that Durietz is gone."

He busied himself with the papers, keeping his own counsel. Only when the pressure relaxed a little, and the secretaries had been dismissed on errands, did he take advantage of being temporarily alone with the King.

"If Your Majesty had given me a commission to supersede Durietz," he said, "there would have been no need of this dangerous and fatiguing journey."

"There was every need of it," said Gustav. "I should have hated to miss my ride!"

"Does Your Majesty doubt my capacity to hold the town?"

"No, oh, no! But politics are a trifle more complicated than my dear Long Axel may realise. I'm always glad of your company and friendship, Axel, but you mustn't ask me for commissions—except perhaps in France. Governing is a ruffianly business and I prefer using ruffians."

"And turning up at the last moment to repair their mistakes? That seems to me a risky method—and, if I may say so, not a very dignified one."

"Dignified? Am I being scolded?" Gustav turned on his elbow and looked quizzically at Fersen. "Or are you still feeling sore because your King knows best what use to make of you?"

"I am a soldier," said Fersen, "and I hope I know how to obey orders. But if——"

"I hope you do!" said Gustav, with something like anger. "I think it is time you learnt your place in the world."

There was silence for a moment. Gustav rolled over on to his back and closed his eyes again. Fersen walked to the window and looked out again upon the steaming crowd.

"I meant what I said, Axel." King Gustav's voice was still hard, though a note of friendship had stolen into it. "God knows I can use any kind of man—in the right place—and God knows I need men in Sweden. But not men like you, not here. The game's going to be a dirty one soon. Go back to France."

"Does France play cleanly?" asked Fersen, his back still turned to the King.

"No. No. It's not possible to do that in politics. Only——"

Oh, God, Axel, why can't you let me go to sleep? You know what I meant when I said, 'Go back to France'. I meant, 'Go back to her'."

IF HE HAD NOT BROUGHT AN ARMY, he had brought energy and courage and common sense. Within a few hours the citizens of Göteborg were stopping gaps in their walls, raising a militia, dragging out rusty cannon from beneath piles of rubbish.

There was no question of flight or surrender: when the Danish commander sent to demand the latter, his envoy was taken to see the South Bridge burnt down and the best chance of retreat cut off. If Gustav had made a theatrical entry, it had at least been a successful one. In a few days the Danes were marching back to the Norwegian frontier with nothing accomplished except a great addition to King Gustav's reputation.

There was no doubt of that in Göteborg. There was no doubt of the kind of member that the city would send to the next Riksdag—nor what instructions he would have in case the King quarrelled with the House of Peers. Durietz was an aristocrat, and Göteborg judged Peers from Durietz.

Pen Quayqua—otherwise called P'ing Kai—had his own interpretation of the scene he had witnessed. It was, by Chinese standards, even more creditable to the King. He said that Gustav was the only European that understood politics or war: having children to govern, he had used a childish stratagem. For nothing would persuade P'ing Kai but that King Gustav had given the Danes much money to march against Göteborg and then given them much money to march away again.

IV

"LISTEN!" BARON EVERT TAUBE lifted his head from the pillow and raised a hand to hush Sophie's prattle for a moment. Then he dropped it again, smiling his apologies. "I thought it was the trumpets," he said. "I thought the Riksdag had opened."

He lay in the bedroom of his town house, but there were enough servants about—there was a sister coming in with sufficient frequency—to safeguard the somewhat hypocritical proprieties of Stockholm. Sophie Piper ran no danger of scandal, visiting the man who was still something of a stranger to her, though he had worshipped her footsteps through fifteen lonely years.

"If it's anything like the time for the Riksdag to open," she said, looking at her little watch, "it must be time for me to be getting back. I told you, didn't I, that I've got a sick man at home to look after? I'm afraid that Adolf's health is breaking up this winter. He doesn't make half such a patient patient as you do!"

She smiled down at Taube; his eyes were fixed on her with an almost embarrassing devotion; lines of suffering puckered his forehead beneath the edge of the white bandage. She sighed, stroking smooth the creases on her lap. She never seemed able to fall in love, not the kind of love that she so easily provoked in men; but it was pleasant to sit beside her wounded soldier, her poorly rewarded knight, and hear his tales of hardships and adventure among the Finnish lakes. It was certainly pleasanter to do so than to hurry home through the January streets, to that other bedroom where the sick man was only her husband, claiming as a right what Evert had never dared to beg from her, giving her no thanks for the little attentions which made poor Evert forget his wound in the glory of her graciousness.

"I'm afraid it is getting late," she said ruefully, "even if you were wrong about the trumpets. Adolf has to have his medicine

before dinner, and he always insists on my being there to give it him. He won't take it from anyone else except the doctor—did you know Father has persuaded him to have Doctor Rossi? So I have to be there three times a day and . . .” She sighed again; Adolf's coughs and rheumatics were so much less romantic than the Cossack sabre-cut on Evert's forehead, the pistol bullet that had struck his leg as he reeled.

“Well,” he said with a pathetic cheerfulness, “it's been a wonderful pleasure to have you here. Of course you must not neglect your husband: I'm sorry to hear he has so much illness these days. But whenever you can spare the time——”

She tried not to notice that his face twitched with pain as he spoke. She rose from the chair, asking a servant to warn her coachman that she was ready.

“There's one good thing about this Riksdag,” she said, adjusting her hat in Evert's mirror, “it'll give Father something better to do than trying to marry cousins to the wrong husbands or wondering how soon he's going to be ruined. Axel and I used to say that Father was ruined twice a year at least, but, after twenty years of it, he seems as rich as ever he was.”

“He'll be busy the next week or two,” said Taube, glad of any new topic that might keep her in the room a little longer.

“He will!” Sophie laughed musically. “The Riksdag trumpets always make Father sniff like an old war-horse. He swore Gustav wouldn't risk another meeting this time, with the war and so on. But he was wrong and he's glad to be wrong. You should have seen him girding on his harness for battle this morning!”

“I wish he wasn't fighting against the King—on the wrong side,” answered Evert. “You'll forgive my calling it that, but when fellows mutiny in the middle of a campaign—oh, I know your father had nothing to do with it; he was as disgusted as anyone! But with the country in danger of invasion——! You know the Russians might attack Stockholm now, and one wants to see everyone, even your father, give the King all the help he can. So many people making mischief! You don't mind my saying that, do you?”

It was odd how like a schoolboy this grizzled soldier talked. It was rather touching. Sophie stretched out an already

gloved hand to him. "Of course not," she said, "so long as you don't mind *my* saying good-bye. It's more than time for Adolf's medicine."

"Good-bye," he said, keeping hold of her fingers a little longer than was needed. "And you know what *my* medicine is, don't you? It's you. So come often, and I'll get well quickly."

They were momentarily alone. But soon the servant would return to announce her coach; he hesitated a moment, then bent his head, peeled back her unbuttoned glove and printed a passionate, a most satisfying kiss upon her wrist. She drew it away, but stood still over him. Evert was improving. Then, being Evert, he suddenly looked crestfallen and sheepish. He even began to murmur excuses about being a sick man, and, when she turned away in disappointment, was clearly thinking that it was the kiss and not the apologies that had brought the frown to her brow.

She was almost glad to see the servant enter; she gave Evert a conventional though a friendly farewell from the door. It was not till she was in her coach, bowling homeward, that a certain phrase of her own began to echo in her ears once more: "I'm afraid," she heard herself saying, "that Adolf's health is breaking up this winter." She wondered if the 'afraid' had rung quite true. She was very far yet from beginning to calculate how many winters Adolf might be sick before the sickness grew mortal. But she was young still, felt herself even younger, and had something within her that could not be satisfied for ever with hesitant kisses on her wrist.

If Taube was older, he was strong, and had had more meagre satisfactions than she had. It would not be strange, nor altogether discreditable, if he too lay listening to the sound of her 'winter'. But his thoughts were interrupted. The trumpets, pealing through Stockholm streets, drowned softer dreams, as they announced that King Gustav had taken the risk his enemies had thought too great. The Riksdag had met. Stockholm (trembling a little lest she should soon be a theatre of war) was to be at least the stage on which a civil strife was fought to a finish, to an issue none could guess.

THEY HAD PEALED THE SAME NOTE through three centuries. Since King Gustav Vasa had broken the hated Union with Denmark, and made Sweden herself again, they had sounded decade by decade, over Helgeandsholm, over all the knot of little islands that had been the heart of Sweden, for a thousand years before she knew the name of Vasa. All Europe envied England her two Houses and their ancient dignities: France was about to revive her Three Estates from the apparent grave in which a half-forgotten King Louis had laid them: but Sweden too, could boast of her fourfold Riksdag, with its eight hundred nobles and fifty clergy, its hundred townsmen and ninescore unlettered peasants, who came to speak the grievances and loyalties of the toilers on her land.

The ninescore could neither read nor write: such had been the decree of the lords who ruled Sweden before Gustav III was born to be their gadfly and their humiliator. An unlettered man, they proclaimed in public, was the only true representative of unlettered peasants: an unlettered man, they told each other round jocular dining-tables, could make little trouble in the Riksdag or the highly sophisticated Stockholm in which its meetings were held. But times were changing now: it was not necessary to read or write in order to know what their lordships' latest joke had been. The uncouth men from meadow and lake, fir-forest and iron-seam, had come to the capital with one idea planted immovably in their stubborn heads. The nobles, the sons of nobles who held King Gustav's commission in the Army, had set the seal on centuries of oppression by banding together to sell Sweden to the Russian and the Dane: good King Gustav had thwarted their monstrous treachery: if he needed the votes of poor men to continue the war, to humble the proud and punish the traitors, then he should have them without stint or hesitation.

Good King Gustav was almost embarrassed by the heartiness of their loyalty. He had a more sober but as tenacious a support from the Burghers, the merchants and shopkeepers from Stockholm and Göteborg and Sweden's hundred lesser cities. He could count on three quarters of the Bishops and clergy—if he handled them tactfully: they were, as a Prebendary observed, like ice that would break under carriage-

wheels but would support a carefully walking man: King Gustav was using no carriages, walking alone and with consummate care. He would need all his supporters. The eight hundred angry noblemen—some all the angrier because of a nagging conscience—had ancient privileges and modern reason to buttress their wrath, not to be lightly flouted: with their servants and hangers-on, they formed an armed force that could do much in Stockholm, should matters pass out of the sphere of privilege and reason.

The King had retired to his Palace at Haga, a mile or two north of Stockholm, to concert plans with those he hoped to win to his side. But his first interview was with Armfelt, his first question—how many armed men could Mauritz march in from the Dales.

"I'll bring twelve hundred," his friend said, frowning, "but I warn you they're a devil of a nuisance. They say their forefathers put Gustav Vasa on the throne (God knows they gave him enough trouble when he'd got there!) and they seem to think that gives them the right nowadays to disobey any order that doesn't jump with their own magnificent opinion of themselves! They're as eager for a fight as anyone can be. I hadn't the least difficulty in raising my twenty thousand to march against the Danes: the trouble was to stop them marching against anyone else they took a dislike to, or even against each other."

"Finish up your coffee," said Gustav calmly, "and don't talk so loud. Things are getting serious. Either the nobles go under or I do, and they'd bribe Badin there—if Badin would let them—to find out what I mean to do."

He smiled at the short, bandy-legged blackamoor who had come in to clear away the coffee-cups. "Herr Armfelt not finished yet," Gustav said to him. "Bring me my tambour, my embroidery, you big black villain."

Little Badin smiled with flashing teeth, and brought forward the frame at which the King sat with needle and thread while he thought out more subtle patterns, in other materials than silk.

"As a matter of fact," said Gustav, cocking his head at it, like a sparrow, "Badin's one of the few men left whom I can

trust in. When he was in my mother's service I told him I'd have his head cut off if he didn't tell me what mischief she was trying to make between me and my wife. As if there wasn't mischief enough, without a mother-in-law's kind care! And Badin believed me, didn't you, you rascal?"

"I not knew what to believe," said the African, adjusting his powdered wig over his coal-black brow. "But I no give secrets of my mistress to other peoples. I, Badin!"

"Well run along and be Badin in the pantry," said Armfelt irritably. "Here's my cup—and thank you for your excellent coffee."

He stretched his legs over the thick-piled carpet and gazed into the fire until the door had closed behind the little negro.

"I'll bring the men," he said. "I'll get them to Drottningholm and try to prevent them breaking your windows there, or burning down your little theatre in a fit of Evangelical rage. You don't know your Dalesmen! But I'd rather not guess, till the time comes, what use you mean to make of them. Not that it would be any good asking you, if I know my Gustav! But I'll have nothing to do with your damned politics. I've never got up in the Talking House yet and I'm certainly not going to begin at my age! Do you know I shall be thirty-two in a fortnight's time? And do you know that you were forty-three last month? We're getting on, Gustav; it's time we learnt caution. Fortune favours the young, and *coups d'état* may be great fun when one's . . . when one's . . . Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said the King. "I just ran the needle into my thumb. Badin's forgotten to bring me my thimble, and I oughtn't to do this kind of work by candlelight. It's too trying to the eyes. Oh, and talking of getting old, what age is Count Lewenhaupt?"

"God knows! Ninety, I should think." Armfelt shuffled off one of his elegant shoes and held up his silk-stockinged toes to the blaze of the fire. "Why do you ask? He's next door to an idiot, isn't he? One can't say senile decay of the brain: he never had one to decay."

"Maybe, maybe. But the House of Peers needs someone of venerable age as its Speaker, its Marshal. There are so few

things that Peers seem to venerate nowadays. And as I appoint the Marshal . . ."

"But you couldn't appoint old Lewenhaupt!" said Armfelt, looking up in surprise. "He's not a King's man, is he? He's not anything except a numskull. He couldn't take the chair at a parish council. The House of Peers would be One Long Brawl."

"Yes, I suppose it might," said the King thoughtfully, drawing a last stitch or two through his embroidery. "But it wouldn't be fair of me to appoint a King's man, one of my own supporters. The House of Peers would resent that." He paused again, hardly smiling at his own irony. "As you say," he continued, "there's quite a good chance that Lewenhaupt's chairmanship might reduce them to . . . might make it necessary to have . . . By the way, why did you use that word just now—just before I pricked my thumb?"

"*Coup d'état?* Well, I——" Armfelt hesitated a moment, fidgeting in his chair. "I suppose," he said, "it was just a certain gleam of mischief in my Gustav's eye, a certain look of '72 coming again. Damn it all, man, you can't pretend you are going to get through this Riksdag without—well, chaining certain lions up—and certain foxes! 'Patriots!' Isn't that what they call themselves, the officers and their fathers—with the whole family-party run on money from St. Petersburg? And every time you have to call the Houses together, there's another shipload of gold coming across the Baltic—blockade or no blockade! You'll have to stop it some time. You'll have to clap irons on one House at least, or find some way of ruling without calling 'em together!"

"I asked you not to talk so loud," said Gustav, "especially when you are telling me about putting people—or, rather, Houses—into irons. You exaggerate, as usual. They don't all take Cousin Catherine's roubles. Old Fersen doesn't, to begin with. He's one of the few 'patriots' that are patriotic, in spite of his queer ideas about me. Johan Engeström doesn't either. Bribery has no part of Count Johan's political theories—they're too much in the air for that! But it's interesting to know that one young officer, having attained to the venerable age of thirty-two, is now sure that it's time I changed Sweden's

Constitution by a—— No, we won't repeat that now—even in Haga." He rose, surveying the sombre pattern of his half-finished embroidery.

"Too much green," he murmured; "it makes the black look dowdy. . . Time you were in bed, Mauritz! It's a long ride to the Dales, and a long march back to Drottningholm. But, by God, it's worth it, Mauritz; you'll find it's worth it!" He swept up the embroidery-frame and carried it, as if he were carrying a standard, to the dark corner of the room. As he returned from the shadows, the fire gleamed in his eyes with a light that even Armfelt had never seen before. "Don't you dare talk to me of 'mischief'," he said with quiet intensity. "This is serious! It's not me or them this time: King Gustav against King Fersen—or President Johan. It's Sweden, and all I've made her, against Anarchy and Corruption and Licking the Boots of Russia, or that gang of brigands in Berlin. Thank God, old Frederick's dead! The new man has only the sweepings of Uncle Fritz's generals, and no brain to use 'em—or let them use him. Uncle Fritz nearly declared war when I sent their lordships packing in '72, and made myself King in Sweden! If I hadn't had France to back me he might have marched—instead of writing a scolding letter to his dear nephew and telling me there was an Ides of March waiting for me if I tampered with my Constitution! I know one thing now, I didn't tamper with it enough! Liberty of the Press, yes! Torture abolished: a good King had no need of these places—Mauritz, you should have seen these filthy places in the prisons, where their lordships kept their racks and branding-irons for anyone who spoke ill of Peers! I was right to sweep all that away. I may have been right to leave 'em the power of the purse, within limits—if only they'd play fair and not take foreign money to stop me getting a penny for my troops. But I should never have let them have War and Peace: that's a King's business: Peace has to be worked for in secret, and War declared as a surprise. People have to trust someone in the end: why shouldn't they trust their King? But this time they'll have to trust me: they won't be given any alternative. And if Russia and Prussia and Denmark try the old trick, 'Maintaining the old Swedish Constitution', the mouldy old rules

I hadn't the courage to sweep away in '72, then you can raise me more Dalesmen and we'll send Russia and Prussia and Denmark to Hell! They played their filthy game on Poland: for centuries they've kept Poland a laughing-stock by supporting 'the ancient rights of the Polish nobility'. My ancestors helped—God forgive them for it! And in thirty years' time, in ten years' time, there'll be no Poland left. Petersburg and Berlin and Vienna have swallowed half of her already, and they're only waiting to swallow the other half, because each is jealous of the other two getting a larger mouthful. But they won't swallow Sweden—not until my Ides of March has come!"

He stood almost on tiptoe, his eyes flashing in the red light of the fire, his panting breath shaking the whole framework of his delicate body. Then suddenly his eyelids closed, his gesturing hands fell calmly to his sides. He stood still a moment. Then he stooped, picked up a needle from the floor and walked over to the embroidery-frame.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, from the shadows, "just after I'd been asking you not to talk too loud! And I shouldn't have told you all that. I shouldn't have told anyone. I must remember that I'm a King, and at Haga—not Marshal of the Talking House in Stockholm."

He came back into the firelight and laid a white hand, a still trembling hand, on Armfelt's shoulder. "Go to bed, Mauritz," he said. "I've a little work yet, a few papers to sign. Ring for Schröderheim, will you? He'll be bringing your commission and I'll put my name to that first, so that you can be off early in the morning."

Schröderheim was not long in coming—pug-faced, faithful Schröderheim with the lovely wife who was anything but faithful. He was as capable and discreet a secretary as any king could want, and he did not allow domestic troubles to lessen his capabilities. He bowed to the King, bowed more stiffly to the favourite. He looked short beside Gustav, who was not tall: he was a dwarf to Armfelt. He began to set out the papers on the little gilt and polished desk. The commission to march twelve hundred Dalesmen to Drottningholm was soon signed, but Armfelt lingered at the door. Gustav walked

restlessly to and fro, knitting his brow over the second document. "What's this?" he asked. "You never told me about it."

"Only a case of sedition, Your Majesty," answered the Secretary. "The man was arrested for suspicious behaviour at Visby, out on the island: the local authorities got it into their heads he was taking pay to send information to the Russian Navy. And when they arrested him, on their own authority, he used extremely abusive language, treasonable language, about Your Majesty. It seems a clear case for making him cool his tongue in gaol."

"Wait a minute, Mauritz." King Gustav was still frowning at the sentence he was asked to ratify with his signature. "I know this man. Anckarström? Wasn't he a page at Drottningholm when you first come to Court? Yes, yes, that's the man! I know he'd never take money from Russian admirals—or anyone else. And as for talk—he had a difficult time as a boy. One can't blame him if he loses his temper sometimes. I remember when I had him as page . . . Mauritz, ring again and ask them for one of those blank forms for a Free Pardon. Jakob Anckerström's my enemy, and maybe he had some good reason for it. I'm sorry to contradict, Schröderheim, but it seems a case for giving Jakob Anckarström a good reason to be my friend again."

FERSEN WAS BACK IN FRANCE. He had spent some days at the Headquarters of his Regiment and then ridden in to Paris, with many tales to tell of Finland and the Swedish war. He felt he deserved a week or two's relaxation.

The Queen was moving from Versailles, even from Trianon. She was taking the children to St. Cloud, where the air was healthier and where there were no memories of her past follies or extravagances to haunt her. Even the affectation of innocence, the little farm near Trianon, where she and her ladies had been playing at Shepherdesses, now seemed tawdry and foolish. She dressed more simply than ever, abandoning satin and jewels. She was wife and mother, and if she looked forward to her friend's arrival it was with her husband's full agreement and co-operation. Even Louis, self-centred in his impassive good nature, was beginning to feel the need of friends.

The friend could hardly share their roof. He took lodgings at Auteuil and walked over to see them at St. Cloud. He did not enter by the high gates or down the front avenue: he picked his way among docks and fresh-growing nettles to the little side-gate in the garden wall.

She would be waiting for him inside, in her plain white dress and wide straw hat. It was still early Spring, but the morning sun was hot, the garden smelt like summer. They could walk arm-in-arm, watching the children play. The Dauphin seemed cured at last; there was good hope that he would grow up to healthy manhood. His little brother was four years old, called Duke of the Normandy he had never seen. Madame Royale, with all the dignity of eleven, was beginning to mother them both and order them about. She would not let them play round the window where their father sat working at his papers, only too willing to be distracted from business of State. She led them off, a procession of diminishing heights, to see whether the beans were sprouting yet, whether the gardeners were doing proper execution on the weeds and slugs.

There was a little waterfall in the garden, a seat opposite it beneath the huge chestnut-tree. Marie-Antoinette and Axel Fersen could sit and listen to the tinkle of the water, could talk of the first thing that came into their heads.

She wanted to hear about Sophie, to whom she had written more than one letter. She wanted to hear of old Count Fredrik: Axel's accounts of his father had always delighted her. There was something about good Swedish folk—pleasure-loving and yet staunch—which attracted this daughter of Vienna as French people could never attract her. She had grown almost an admirer of Gustav and was certainly glad of his successes. "But there's a good deal I don't understand yet," she said. "He never defeated the Danes, but they seem to have given up."

"There's something that no one in Europe understands," he answered, smiling, "or so my father says. The English are a wonderful people."

"The English?"

"Yes. Hugh Elliott, the English ambassador, suddenly decided that our war with the Danes might be an inconvenience to England. He hadn't an army or a fleet or an extra guinea to back him. He just went to the Danish Commanders and talked down to them, as English squires talk to their tenants and farm-hands. He told them—on his own authority—that England disliked the idea of their invading Sweden. He did a little bluffing, of course, made a few threats he could never have fulfilled. He even persuaded the Prussians to help him bully Denmark. And Denmark touched her cap to him and withdrew! Gustav has no one to reckon with now except Cousin Catherine."

"And his Riksdag. Or has he some trick to get round that?"

"He'll have a hundred. God knows what'll happen in the end, but for the moment Sweden is eating out of his hand. I wish you could call him in to deal with these States-General that Necker is making you call."

"Making us?" Marie-Antoinette bridled a moment. Then she sighed, picking at a thread in her skirt. "I suppose you're right, Axel," she said. "Poor Louis is hardly King now. He

just signs what he's told to. I hope we haven't made a mistake. What do you think of Necker?"

"Someone once asked me that the other day," said Axel. "I think my answer was rather witty. I said he gargled with all the virtues and never swallowed any of them. I suppose he wants an audience to whom he can demonstrate the art of gargling."

She laughed, but without real merriment. "You're not exactly unprejudiced, are you?" she said. "You're always thinking of him as someone whose daughter you didn't marry."

"Someone," he said with unnecessary emphasis, "whose daughter I thank God that I escaped! I'm glad I'm not in Erik Staël's shoes, the way she's carrying on now! I'm even glad I've not married at all. There are other ways of being happy."

"So long as you are happy." Marie-Antoinette laid a hand upon his, resting on the bench. "I only hope that you—that I haven't kept you from . . . from things that most men want. No, you needn't tell me about the other women. You certainly needn't look apologetic. I'm not jealous, and one isn't easily shocked, after a few years at Versailles!"

"No, I wasn't going to apologise," he said with difficulty. "I'd only like you to know that they mean nothing to me, less than nothing when I'm sitting beside you. God knows why I——! Men are men, I suppose, and I'm as weak as most."

"Poor Axel!" Her hand clasped his a little more tightly and then relaxed again. "You're not weak, you know—only you're still rather handsome, and rather easy to capture. I suppose that's why I caught you, while all France resists my wiles!" She stood up, bewitching but a little sad. "I'm glad we've had this talk," she said. "And now if you'll give me a kiss, we can go in and have lunch with my husband!"

It was perhaps fortunate that King Louis, sitting by his study window, was not able to see as far as the waterfall. The kiss started gently enough, but ended with something like passion—until Marie-Antoinette broke away and stood, panting a little, behind the bench. "And Queen or no Queen," he said, picking up her straw hat from the path, "you won't need to ask next time."

She led the way, her head held high, but with no word to say. As they went, there was a sudden rustling in the bushes, twenty yards away. A face peeped through, a worn, haggard face, like that of a sick eagle, but crowned with clouds of grey hair. The man was kneeling in the shrubbery, his piercing eyes fixed immovably on the Queen.

"Who is it?" asked Axel. "How dare he——" He was about to leap across the flower-beds and drag the intruder from his inadequate hiding-place, but Marie-Antoinette laid a hand upon his arm.

"No," she said. "It's only Castelnau. Surely you know my Castelnau?"

"How did he get in here?"

"He can get in anywhere. He's climbed the garden wall at Trianon a dozen times. He's quite mad, you know: Louis wanted to have him shut up. But he does no one any harm. He wouldn't even frighten the children. And I like to have two people in France in love with me . . . even if one's a foreigner and the other a lunatic!"

MAURITZ ARMFELT WAS PROVING RIGHT ABOUT the House of Peers, under Count Lewenhaupt's Marshalship. Long before he got back to Drottningholm with his Dalesmen, the Long Brawl had started. Their lordships had opened proceedings by 'laying on the table' (as the quaint old phrase ran) the King's first and most urgent measure for saving Sweden from invasion. The quaint old phrase meant that the measure must lie undebated, while grievances and accusations were interminably aired. The discussions grew more and more fevered: King's men were howled down, the King himself denounced in slashing invective: threats were followed by deeds, and more than one sword flew from its gilt scabbard beneath the painted ceiling of the House of Peers.

Old Lewenhaupt, frightened of the King, frightened of the King's opponents, frightened above all of those flashing sword-blades, sat doddering and dithering in the Marshal's chair. He sent messages to the King, and the King returned politely cutting replies that only fanned the flames into a blaze. He attempted to rise and adjourn the House: the House shouted at him to sit still and let them vote the King's plans to perdition. They committed the folly of inviting the three other Houses to join them in angry remonstrance: the Clergy smirked, the townsmen were pained and resentful, the Fourth House rocked with the broad laughter of the united Peasants. Disappointed, and knowing secretly that they had invited disappointment, the Peers grew wilder than ever. Lewenhaupt looked down from the Chair upon an ocean of angry faces, a thunderstorm of indignant oratory.

They were asking him to register another motion, the angriest yet framed. They were demanding that he take it to the King, in token of defiance. He rose to protest, to modify their transports. They were deaf to protests, beyond the reach of moderation. Their ancient Parliament House was beginning to glitter again with those unparliamentary swords: the blades

even clashed against each other, King's men against patriots. And there was no knowing when a sharp point might not come darting towards the Marshal's Chair. Old Lewenhaupt could not hear, but he could see Count Johan Engeström declaiming on French thought and Swedish fact: his excitement made him more like a preacher than ever. Frietzky, over there, was shouting blasphemies, while young Clas Horn's father applauded all he said. Brahe and De Geer were astonishing everyone with the names they found for King Gustav. But the climax, the topmost point of incredibility, was Fersen himself—old Count Fredrik Fersen—roaring at the Chair like an infuriated bull, threatening almost, to charge the Chair and make matchwood of that last flimsy barrier between Royalty and its outraged nobles.

The Chair surrendered: it did as the Peers demanded, and sent their resolution to the King. The Chair was no longer a bewildered old gentleman trying to collect slow wits: the Chair had lost its wits altogether and was wondering whether or no to creep beneath the table. But its messenger had gone, some semblance of quiet and even dignity was returning to the House. A mile or two to northward, Gustav read the flowery but offensive message, sent a far curter one to Armfelt at Drottningholm, and ordered the troops in the capital to stand to arms. He had few enough—a paltry fifty of the Light Dragoons. The rest garrisoned the frontier, or at least stood near it, while their officer parleyed for its betrayal to the Russian. But, Light Dragoons or none, the King had a light touch: if things could be done without bloodshed, Gustav would do them. There was still Wit and Ingenuity and Eloquence to be tried. The royal founder of the Academy of Art, Oratory and Letters decided to try Eloquence first; he would keep wit and ingenuity in pickle for the next turn. Unlike many founders, he could practise what he patronised: his prose style was judged by friend and foe alike, to be a pattern to his age. Unlike most kings, he spoke to his Parliament in words that he himself had framed.

HE HAD HIS CORONATION ROBES AT HAGA: he had the silver sceptre that Gustavus Adolphus had wielded when all Germany, all Europe, lay at his conquering feet. Thus clad and armed, it was not to the House of Peers that he would go. He would drive to the Riks-Saal, the great Hall of State, where all Four Orders could assemble to hear their King in wrath. Lewenhaupt was too frightened to lead the Nobles thither; he pleaded illness, leaving the 'patriot' Brahe to take the Marshal's place. The other three Orders needed no leading, but the doubtful Archbishop walked at the head of the Clergy—a poor figure beside the Bishop of Växjö, the King's man Wallquist, with the mane and head of a forest lion. When Lydberg, Alderman of Stockholm, had ushered in the Townsmen, stout Olof Olofsson the Peasants, they were ready for the entrance of Gustavus Adolphus's heir.

Here was no moment for an entry, for the nicely calculated timing of the actor's appearance. Sincerity would do more than a thousand clever tricks. The King marched in with flashing eyes and cheeks red with excitement; but there was no trace of nervousness or hesitation, no trembling of hand or voice. He took the throne, he swept his gaze over the silently watching ranks; then his quiet voice began to ring and linger round the walls and windows of the hall.

"It is now fourteen days," he said, "since I summoned you hither, and told you what weighty reason lay behind my summons. I hid nothing from you, I laid bare all the disasters of the past four months. I demanded from you a Council, to deliberate swiftly and secretly, without the turmoil of party strife, and save this poor kingdom from her ring of foes. There were to be men of every Order on that Council: twelve Peers, six Prelates, six Town-members and six of my good Peasants. I told you that it must meet at once: I told you that the enemy was arming to destroy us, and that only lightning blows could defend us from his hate. The Church, the Worshipful Company of Burgesses, the Honourable Estate of the Peasants, all these obeyed the call with the same devotion as their brothers and cousins on the field of battle. But you, my Lords, you who are called Gentlemen and Nobles, you were so far from setting a good example to those by whose prayers, by whose toil you

flourish, that you could not even follow in the path they had marked before you. You talked and hesitated and delayed. You prolonged your needless debates upon matters that are not yours to handle. They were matters that should be left to rest until time and fortune and our country's safety allow them to be discussed in peace. You thought otherwise, or pretended so to think. You must turn these things over in your House, and sow the seeds from which spring panic and delay—with no advantage save to the intrigues and interests of our enemy.

"You have done more. You have done that for which any King, or any worth the name, must require your penitence and submission. Your own Marshal, the grey-haired leader of your Order, has been insulted and threatened, brow-beaten and humiliated in his official place. Hear now my sentence, before I speak further what must soon be spoken. Hear what you have done, and what you must now do to make requital for your shameless riot."

He paused, signing to the awed clerk to rise and read the Royal rescript on what had passed in the House of Peers. He did not look again at the three lower Orders. He could feel them sitting in breathless interest and delight, listening while a King denounced what no King had dared to speak of before, save privately, where the unprivileged could not hear him or triumph over their more splendid adversaries. His eyes were still fixed, over little Schröderheim's ugly, impassive head, upon the ranks of astonished and outraged nobles. And they were fixed in cold scorn, with no hint of apology or surrender.

The clerk finished his reading. The rescript was known by all to demand the self-abasement of the proud, the pledge that their misdeeds should cease. The offence was made as manifest as the punishment, and its indictment gave him his cue to speak again.

"Who is there here," he said, "that cannot recognise what has happened? Long ago I slew the spirit of Faction among you, the spirit of distrust and licence whose father is the father of all Evil. Now it has been brought back to life, for motives no man dare avow, to sow in the hearts of my people the hatred of their King. What have I done, however innocent, however

trivial, that has not been painted in the colours of Malice and of Danger? Men speak of Liberty, and they know, in their hearts, that they seek only liberty to oppress the poor, liberty for the highly-born to escape from the burdens that should lie on all men. It was that, in all its folly and hideousness, that I crushed when I came to kingship. It is that which now rears its head again, tricked out with new falsehoods, to deceive the unwary or perverse.

"You know that I am not lying to you. You know the names of your ancient oppressors, who once held all Sweden in their cruel grip. On which side are those names now inscribed, when men vote for or against their King? My grip has been far from cruel: for sixteen years this country had been ruled by friendliness, by the loyalty that only friendliness and good sense command: and for sixteen years those who had not the wit or the nature to rule as I have ruled, ate out their hearts in malice and envy of my success. If I speak sternly now, it is for the first time. You know, and they know too, that sternness has been forced upon me, who was not born to punish.

"They have one trick, one weapon left, when all others have splintered in their hands. They could not shake your love and loyalty by any truth or half-truth, however distorted on their cunning lips; now they turn in their spite, and brand me with the lie of Tyranny. I need not tell you that that name is more hateful to me than ever it can be to you. Words mean little when deeds can witness for me. Sixteen years ago I broke what was indeed a tyranny, and for three days, by your help, your gratitude for deliverance, I held in my hands such power as no monarch has dreamt of, since Charlemagne was lord of Christendom. I laid that power down. I gave it back into your hands. I was content only to put an end to Anarchy and Licence. Need I say again what I then proved in action? Need I tell you that, if Absolute Power were offered me on bended knee, I would reject the gift? Faction and Disorder may force it for a time into my reluctant hands; when Faction and Disorder are conquered, I will again surrender what I have never hankered to retain. I know no higher honour than to be the champion of true Freedom, but I know, too, that I was

born to carry this ancient sceptre to the terror of wrong-doers, and that if they seek to wrest it from me with the same presumption as moved them to lay hands of sacrilege upon my father's crown—then I will strike, and strike without ruth or hesitation. I will not suffer one small fraction of my people to raise barriers that hinder our own defence while they let in upon us the flood-tide of our enemies!"

He paused for breath, his eyes flashing with ancestral fires. The peasants were rising from their benches, were clamouring blessings and honour upon the head of their King. But Gustav smote with his sceptre upon the table before him and commanded silence from friend and foe alike.

"I have more to tell you," he said with sober energy, "and it shall be plain and homely truth. I demand my rights as your King. I demand money to pay and clothe my poor soldiers, to set my fleets aswim. If our sister kingdom of Finland is ravaged by the enemy, if our own coasts feel the burden of his cruelties, if this city in which you are met should hear its doom in the sound of ever-nearing guns, then it will not be I whom you must blame, not I who have failed in my duty. It is those who would rather see a Russian army marching through your streets, a Russian dictating peace to Stockholm, than forgo for an instant the rancour they cherish against their own countrymen and their country's King. Let them make their shameful peace with the enemy; let it be the ineradicable blot upon my reign, the endless stigma on the great name my fathers handed down to me. I will not sign it. I will sign nothing that brings dishonour upon Sweden. I would rather have the crown of Gustavus shattered about my brows than hand it on unbroken to my son with the stains of infamy upon it.

"My lords and gentlemen, I have spoken at length and maybe wearied you with my insistence. But I cannot close without warning you that you have a trust, both towards me and towards your fellow-countrymen of the other Three Estates. You break that trust while you let precious hours go by in dissension, in the usurping of powers that are not rightly yours. You break it more criminally when you sow broadcast the seeds of panic and suspicion between us. My lords, I have

not deserved such treatment at your hands. I have shown you favour in the past. I have suffered you to lord it over those that now rise up to defend my throne and kingdom, while you stand sneering at their zeal. I will suffer it no longer, until you have earned your lordship by submission to the common good. You have heard the rescript, and I need do no more than demand that you obey it.

"You will return from this Hall to your own House. A deputation will be formed, headed by whoever is senior amongst you, seconded by the Count Fredrik von Fersen, the Baron Carl De Geer. It will proceed to the Marshal's house, offer apologies in your name, and conduct him back to the House of Peers. He will there expunge from your records all reference to your late disorders. My lords and gentlemen, my lords of the Church, my good burghers and peasants, I have no more to say."

He sat motionless. His eyes were veiled. He must keep himself from all pity for the men he had wounded and humiliated. But he had firm hold upon himself now. Among the seething nobles, the astonished clergy, the jubilant ranks of tradesmen and peasants, there was perhaps no man present at that moment, not even the imperturbable Schröderheim, who was more completely master of himself than the King.

The victory was not yet won. There were murmurs among the Peers, and already Count Fersen was rising, asking for leave to speak.

"I will not grant it," answered Gustav coldly. "I did not summon your Order here to argue with me; I summoned you to obey. Your lordship has risen from his place. Will you now lead your fellow-members back to their House, to do as they are bid?"

The old man tried still to speak. The murmurs grew loud again, hands stole to the hilts of jewelled swords. But Gustav smote once more with the sceptre, once more demanded compliance from those he had silenced and accused.

There was a long silence, unbearable in its tension. Count Fersen stood motionless. The fate of Sweden, the fate of the whole North trembled in the hands of an old man, wearied by sixteen years of disappointment, of exclusion from power, of

talents rusting in undeserved idleness. Then he turned to Count Brahe beside him, his eyes averted from the figure on the throne.

"Come," he said, with infinite sadness in his tone. "Let us go back to our own House."

THE KING HELD HIS SECRET COUNCIL that night: the wheels were set in motion that should carry Sweden to safety, if not to triumph. There were eighteen members present. Six from each lower Order. No twelve had appeared from the Peers.

They were not beaten yet, or would not own themselves beaten. If they followed Fersen to the House of Peers, it was to upbraid him with the tameness of his surrender before the windy power of Eloquence. Eight hundred against one, it was not long before they had hurt his pride to the quick, wounded him more deeply than he had been wounded by King Gustav's words. It was not long before he was giving them the lead again, framing a message to the Throne: the Peers could not consent to destroy its own dignity by complying with the King's demands.

They did not know what the King was that moment showing to the Secret Council. They did not know that proposals were already in writing to destroy the ancient privileges of their Order. All Swedes were to have the right to possess land, reserved through intolerable centuries for the Nobles: office should be open to all, and the meanest peasant might hope one day to exercise the highest powers of State.

The Act went further. It gave Gustav rights which approached those Absolute ones for which he had disclaimed desire. He still left the Houses with the power of the purse—no mean concession for a king who saw politics with such unclouded eyes as his. But his claims were sufficiently startling to leave the eighteen gasping. Gustav pleaded that all Europe sickened for lack of trust in Kings, that only a general firmness such as his could save civilisation from the spectres that haunted its impending future. They could not all rise to such heights of speculation, or could not accept the

extravagant plea of a King for his own Kingship. The Archbishop, head of the clerical sextette, decided to follow the Marshal's lead into an ignoble safety. He retired home, put a thick sock over his foot in token of crippling gout, and entrusted his duties and perils to his colleague of Linköping, to the lion-hearted Wallquist for Växjö.

He was not alone in scenting danger. Townsmen and even Peasants began to waver. If Gustav did as he threatened, and submitted his Secret Act to open debate in the Houses, it was doubtful whether three of them would pass it, while certain that in the fourth it could not win a vote. He must not risk his previous success by repeating the attack of Eloquence. There was still Wit and Trickery, wherewith he was abundantly supplied. But the ground was getting too soft and untrustworthy for light manœuvre. It must be frozen again by some act of Rigour.

Gustav sat late at Haga. He signed twenty-one documents, drawn up in secret in Schröderheim's careful script. They were not pardons. They were launched that evening when wind and rain had left Stockholm streets a desert . . . a desert through which twenty-one little processions started from various great houses and ended at the Palace of Fredrikshof—a comfortable, a temporary, but an undeniable prison. The King was conferring with Armfelt; he was conferring with certain officers of the Dragoons. He summoned his wavering brother, Duke Carol of Södermanland: Carl had shown signs, these many months, of wanting to write 'patriot' across his rather ambiguous reputation. By midnight he was won over. He took away a commission, appointing him military governor of Stockholm: he rode back to the Capital to exercise military powers. It would be an easier task, with the twenty-one leaders of disaffection clapped safely under lock and key.

IT WAS IN THE EVENING, a few days later, when Sophie came to Haga. Her husband was ill, but she had not come to speak of him. She had come to plead with Gustav in the name of that impalpable thing called Good Society, which only fools despise. She had come to tell him that Good

Society demanded, respectfully demanded, the release of Count Fredrik Fersen.

"I know you think Father has always been your enemy," she said, "but you did not arrest him in '72. You arrested all his friends, and we forgave you for it. He's an old man now, and we can't forgive you for putting him in prison."

He could not help being amused. It was comic to hear this fragile, ignorant, delightful creature speak to him as her father would never have dared to speak. But if he stood firm now, against her still boyish charm, her petulant impatience with all politics, he could soon be done with Rigour and let the Comedy begin.

"I did not arrest your father in '72," he said, "because there was no need to do so. I wrote to him at Ljung, and he wrote me back one of the most charming letters I have ever had. Your father is a scholar and a gentleman. I assure you that he will be treated as such." He gave her a quizzing glance, but she would not smile back. "He'll be looked after," he said, "as he's never been looked after in his life. I mean no reflection on your mother's house-keeping, nor on his dutiful daughter. But I assure you that the Palace, my Palace, is as comfortable as Blasieholm, and that my . . . guests there are living like fighting cocks. It's a great deal more than some of them can appreciate or deserve. Engeström appreciates none of the really good things of life, unless he's sure they have a sound theoretical basis. And Pechlin certainly doesn't deserve all that . . ."

"Pechlin!" Sophie shrugged irritated shoulders. "I didn't come here to plead for that old pig . . . nor even for Count Engeström. I came here to say that if my father is kept in prison much longer, something will be destroyed that no one can replace, something that . . . oh, how can I explain? Anyway, it isn't a question of whether he's being well treated or not. Father would gladly live on bread and water for his principles, even at his age. It's . . . it's . . . well, all I can say is that you are certain to regret it, living here all alone at Haga." She broke off, her eye wandering round the unfamiliar walls of the audience-room. Haga was the newest of the palaces: it was not finished yet. She did not know it as

she knew the miniature Versailles at Drottningholm, or the grim and massive battlements of Gripsholm that encased within them such elegant and delightful drawing-rooms. "Things were so happy once," she said, "we were all such friends together. When Axel first came home, before he went to fight in America, and you . . . and Your Majesty was——" She fell silent again, watching his tired and slightly ironic face. These last weeks had fatigued even the indefatigable Gustav.

"Thank you for the 'Majesty,'" he said with a trace of bitterness, "and thank you for remembering that I once made people happy. I'm glad if you and your brother were among them. I've not had too much happiness myself, and there seems little more in store for me. Especially if things turn out as you predict . . . Won't you sit down?"

She shook her head. She was still dressed in her furs and muff, guarded from the icy cold of February. "I came to tell Your Majesty," she said with a quaint simplicity, "that you can easily be happy again. Keep old Pechlin in gaol—the longer the better. Keep Count Engeström and Clas Horn's father. I'll tell Clas to write some more silly poems on 'The Captive's Woes'. But if Your Majesty keeps Father much longer, you can say good-bye to all your friends, all the people you have been happy with, these sixteen years."

He sat motionless, watching the firelight on her pelisse, her cheeks whipped to freshness by the cold drive from Stockholm. "Not all," he said. "I have friends still . . . Mauritz, and Schröderheim. Please don't laugh at Schröderheim because his wife laughs at him while she plays him false!"

"I wasn't laughing. I don't feel like laughing at all. I know when things are serious."

"I'm sorry. So many women laugh at Schröderheim. He can't help his face, and he's a faithful friend. Perhaps you won't laugh when I say I've another friend here, with a face that's coal-black."

"Badin?"

"Badin. As one gets older, one forgets the difference between friends and servants. I need both now, if only the few. I need allies. I'm only sorry that . . . other people can't spare me Axel. Other affairs, other duties. Axel's in

France. By the way, things are beginning to go there; he'll soon be learning to be my ally. He'll soon realise why I've had to arrest your father—for a week or two—and keep him under arrest: why I can't oblige his pretty sister when she comes to Haga to beg—or is it to demand?—her father's release."

She bridled a little at the 'pretty'. "I told you," she said, "that I knew things were serious. Is Your Majesty forgetting it?"

"I wish I could," he said. "Serious! Sweden, Russia, Berlin . . . But you turn up your nose at politics. You won't, you know, when you hear the guns in Stockholm Fjord." Suddenly his anger blazed out. "How dare you come here," he asked, "to criticise what I do in time of war? Half the men I arrested were taking money from the enemy!"

"Father wasn't." Sophie did not wilt for an instant. "You know they offered it to him, sent round from the Russian Embassy. And you know what his answer was."

"I'm not here to argue with you! I'm here to govern. And I tell you again that Sweden is at war!"

She did not look at him: she did not need to, daring to say what even the Peers had not ventured to his face. "Who started the war?" she asked, and for long minutes there was silence in the room.

"I can't tell you that," he said at last. "No one will ever know. Put what blame you like on my shoulders. But I sometimes think this war was on its way before you or I were born. I only know that, now it's upon me, I can't sleep for listening—listening for the sound of guns. And when sleep comes, I dream of them still, and of all that will happen if I fail."

"And if you succeed, as you call it?" Her eyes challenged him. "What kind of a Sweden will it be? You know what you're throwing away, for the sake of your success. That's what I came here to tell you. The whole sixteen years of friendship, of helping each other to live, all gone for nothing because you're so sure that you're the only man that can save us from the guns. I suppose kings get to think like that. I suppose most men do, in the end. It's only women that can

see how much they throw away." She was still defiant, could still bite a little. It was an impalpable thing that she offered, in return for his surrender; but it was a very real one, and very dear to such natures as his, Kings and rulers by chance and not by choice.

"You must go now," he said quietly. "I have so much to think of, and I must not let my thoughts be distracted by . . . by what you tell me . . . by your presence here."

"By the truth, you mean. I'm here to tell you the truth."

"Perhaps. And perhaps a part of the truth I should have seen earlier, though I couldn't have given way to it. I can't give way now. I must ask you, of your graciousness . . . No, I'm not laughing at you . . . I must ask you to go away and not disturb me from what I have begun."

RIGOUR HAD DONE ITS WORK. Persistence in Rigour, the sacrifice of a hundred elegant friendships, were helping to persuade poor men that their King was in earnest. Bishop Wallquist swore that, whatever Shop and Farm might do, it was hopeless to persuade the Church into voting the King his Act; but Bishop Wallquist was wrong: partly by his help, the Clergy, too, were won over. The Nobles were beyond any winning. But, with their leaders arrested, they might be tricked or jockeyed.

Gustav refused at first, to give them time to deliberate. He summoned them to the Riks-Saal again, overawing the timid with the threat of further eloquence. But his insistence on immediate, undebated compliance provoked an unexpected outburst.

Herr Secretary Adlerbeth was no longer 'Herr' and seldom 'Secretary.' He had a Title now; he sat among the Peers. He no longer read guide-books and boiled them down to articles for the local newspaper of his native town; he was a poet, writing plays that were acted on Stockholm stages, poems that were worth the reading. His speeches in the Riksdag were still as pompous as his orations on Italian Art to the Academy (whereof he was member); but there was a homely sincerity behind the rhetoric. He had used it till now in the King's

battle. When the King demanded an end of battle, and abject and unthinking surrender, poor Adlerbeth came forward to risk all that he had gained by his fifteen years of royalism. He made his clumsy way through the packed benches of smouldering Peers. He stumbled to the King's feet and knelt there in respectful protest. He poured out his heart in gratitude for Gustav's favours, in petition for a halt in Gustav's unswerving progress over the ruins of the Order to which he himself had climbed. "We are all as moved as I," he said, "all burning with the same ardours and anxieties. How can we give our voices now, without debate and reflection, on a matter that affects a Kingdom, that will affect the fate of millions yet unborn?"

He had his way. Gustav departed, touched by the strange appeal of the ordinary man; for no poetry could change the essential ordinariness, the stout honesty of Adlerbeth's soul. The Peers retired to their own House. The talking began again. It was about everything except the war and Sweden's danger: its mere lengthiness was a denial of emergency or of the need for speed; its echoes began to wake new stirrings in the coffee-houses and drawing-rooms of Stockholm. They penetrated the walls of Fredrikshof, they reached the elegant room where Pechlin sat in comfort, counting whether this was the twentieth or the twenty-first time he had been in durance for conspiracy. The old sinner smiled, asking the empty roof why Gustav was so soft-hearted as to listen to an Adlerbeth; but he wore a puzzled frown when he began to speculate how it was that Gustav, soft heart and all, had been so long successful.

Gustav had been successful by talents unknown to the Pechlins: the time was come to make use of them again. The Riksdag had been dragged out over two months and more. It was April: soon the ice would be breaking up, the ships of war could sail in from Russia. The Peers would not vote Gustav a subsidy to pay for fleets to meet them, for troops and guns and food. Early one spring morning, before the Marshal had finished breakfast or a full-dress debate begun, they were starting on one of their wearisome wrangles, when they were disturbed by cheering in the square outside. In a.

few moments, the King was among them; not as King, he assured them, but as Peer, as heir to the Vasa Dukes. It was the senior Peerage, so far as it existed; it entitled its holder to take the Marshal's chair in the Marshal's absence. He was soon seated in it, soon telling them that the other Three Estates had granted his Majesty a war-budget, and were approving his new laws for governing Sweden on necessarily more absolute lines.

He had heard, though he could hardly believe, that the Peers were delaying to follow this excellent example; at least, as temporary Marshal, he could give them the chance to belie the slander by putting the matter to an immediate vote. "It can be done by voices," he said, "according to ancient custom. Will those in favour of the subsidy give me their 'Ayes'?"

There was a moment's silence in the House, broken by a few scattered 'Ayes' from such King's Men as had not had their breath taken away by the King's play-acting at this un-theatrical hour. But when Gustav, after making solemn pretence to count, asked for the 'Noes', Opposition was quick to fill the House with clamour, to make the walls rock with a chorus of indignant negatives.

Gustav heard them out. He let them shout for a minute or more, and then raised a deprecatory hand. "Thank you, gentlemen," he said, "for making your will so clear. I am glad to see that the Ayes have it." And before they could recover from their rage and stupefaction, the self-appointed Marshal, the self-styled Duke of Vasa, had walked with sprightly step into the sunlit square.

They dared not follow. They could not brave the ugly looks of the crowds that had gathered in the street. They swore it was a 'claque', an audience that Gustav had hired to applaud his performance and intimidate his opponents. But outside the theatre, a short way outside the walls of Stockholm, there were twelve hundred armed peasants, chafing at Armfelt's order to halt at Drottningholm, chafing to break into the city and teach their lordships to accept whatever measures the King had tricked past their vote.

Sweden was going to obey the trickster as well as applaud. Voted or unvoted, she would pay the taxes for his war

The Box Office was filled with money, and the orchestra could strike up for the Finale. It was three months since the trumpets had announced to the streets and sick-beds of Stockholm that King Gustav was risking his fortunes on the stage of another Riksdag: now their long-drawn fanfare announced that the risk had been justified, that Eloquence and Rigour and Trickery had all played their parts in making the performance a success.

BOOK THREE
THE DANCE OF PEOPLES

*

CHAPTER FIVE
DELUGE (1789-90)

CONTENTS OF CHAPTER FIVE

THE THREE ODDITIES OF MR. MORRIS

SOLDIER'S LEAVE

GUNS AT SEA

HUNGER

BAKER'S JOURNEY

TURNCOAT

MR. GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, OF MORRISANA, New York, was stumping down the Rue de Noailles.

There were at least three odd things about Mr. Morris. To begin with, there was his Christian name, which was hardly a Christian name at all, but his mother's surname. Miss Gouverneur had presumably been of French origin, and her son had had to suffer for it.

There was also the slight oddity about Mr. Morris's political opinions. He held the strange doctrine—strange at least among his contemporaries—that there were no good and no bad forms of government: he held that different countries required different kinds of rulers. So far as his own country was concerned, he had been quite clear that King George was not a suitable ruler, especially a King George who lived in London, thousands of miles away, and knew little of the conditions of America. He had been prominent among those who spoke, though not among those who fought, against King George's suzerainty: but no sooner had the attempts to enforce it been defeated than Mr. Gouverneur Morris found himself suspected of attempting to crown the American Constitution with some king of his own devising—possibly with King George Washington. He was certainly convinced that the French people were fundamentally monarchical, and nothing that he had encountered during his five months' residence in Paris, not all the vague talk of Revolutions and Constitutions and even Republics in the *salons*, had modified his opinion in the least.

The third and most literally odd thing about him was his legs. One of them—the right—was strong, shapely, and elegantly encased in grey silk stocking of expensive pattern. The other consisted of a stout but battered piece of timber with a knob at the end; it had been cut from a tree near Philadelphia in the year 1780, shortly after Mr. Morris's unsuccessful attempt to prevent two high-spirited horses from

running away with his phaeton in the streets of that pleasantly-situated town.

It was now 1789. It was, to be precise, Tuesday, the fifth of May, and a fine morning, after yesterday's damnable down-pour. The fragment of Pennsylvanian oak was helping Mr. Morris to make his way along a side-street of the little town of Versailles, carrying him, he hoped, towards the Place D'Armes and the Royal Palace.

The main road, by which he had come from Paris (starting at a most ungentlemanly hour in the morning), was much too crowded to allow of the further passage of a coach. Mr. Morris told his driver to put him down, turned left, and hoped for the best. He was wondering whether he would be able to reach the seat he had hired in the *Salle Des Menus Plaisirs* before the fun began.

Of his three abnormalities, Mr. Gouverneur Morris had had to grow accustomed to the physical one. So far as his name went, it had not occurred to him, since some unhappy days at school, that there was anything unusual about it. But he was constantly reminded of the surprise his political opinions occasioned in such circles as would naturally welcome an American citizen in the city of Paris. He was going to the first session of the States-General with a wooden leg, a queer name, and a perfectly open mind about the King's wisdom or lack of wisdom in reviving, after two and a half centuries, that somewhat unwieldy Parliament.

The Rue De Noailles, after one sharp bend, led him into a long straight avenue, converging towards the Paris road and the Place D'Armes. As he reached the street-corner, Mr. Morris could see the vast pile of the Palace, and stood transfixed with new wonder, among the hurrying crowd, at that sunlit monument to the splendours of monarchy.

At the same time he discovered the crowd was a little thinner and that the people of Versailles were more considerate towards one-legged foreigners than those who were flocking in from Paris. He was soon across the Place, past the lordly railings, and into the vast paved courtyard of the Palace. By eight o'clock he was installed in a somewhat narrow seat on the gallery of the *Menus Plaisirs* and was learning from his

equally cramped neighbours that he would probably have three hours to wait.

In the end he waited four: nothing happened till midday. Gouverneur had plenty to occupy him. He could gaze round him and recognise acquaintances. It was perhaps unwise to look as though he recognised that curious little Staël woman, who had no doubt come to hear her father give tongue on the subject, the really burning subject, of the Finances; she was, surely, a greater oddity than Mr. Morris himself, bearing her husband children while she searched the *salons* for what she called Love, even making eyes at Mr. Morris when he was introduced to her, wooden leg and all. But it was a pleasure to nod to Madame De Chastellux (he was in no position to bow) and to remember his recent interview with her in a bathroom. She had been at her ablutions when he called, but she had tactfully poured a cloudy liquid into her bath-water, submerged all but her head and neck, and received him with complete propriety. The French, reflected Mr. Morris, were a very remarkable people.

The Flahauts were there, too, having a house of their own in Versailles. The sight of them reminded him that he had risen equally early the day before, made much the same journey through the pouring rain, and, by Madame Flahaut's kindness, watched the procession from her dry and comfortable window. Of the three Estates, the poor clergy had looked most bedraggled, like cats protesting against rain and wet feet as intolerable outrages upon their dignity. Among Nobles and Commons, it was interesting to see who the crowd applauded most, and who—Mirabeau, for instance—they saw fit to hiss: Mirabeau's political opinions were hardly known as yet, and one would not have expected a French crowd to hiss a man merely because he was a rake. Gouverneur had been slightly irritated at the confident applause that greeted M. De La Fayette, who, a few days before, had paid very scant attention to Mr. Morris's proposals for dealing with the dearth in Paris. On the other hand, it had been amusing to see the frantic welcome accorded to Mirabeau's patron, the Duke of Orleans: he had enough money to buy others than Mirabeau: and apart from those who clapped because they were paid to

do so, there were plenty who clapped because M. D'Orléans, refusing to walk with the Royal Family and the Princes of the Blood, took his place in the procession as a good patriot should—solely as a member of an elected Commons, a representative of the Nation.

The Queen had been met with stony silence, Diamond Necklaces and a few other things standing between her and any chance of popularity. She had faced it out proudly; she could hardly expect cheers if she were really saying to herself (as Mr. Morris guessed in his diary that night): 'I'm submitting now to the *canaille*; but my time will come!' Her husband had his full mead of plaudits; Mr. Morris's opinion about the essential king-worship of the French soul was sufficiently justified.

The applause was beginning again now, in the Salle Des Menus Plaisirs. It woke Mr. Morris from his memories of yesterday's procession. Things were going to get under way at last. A Bishop was getting clapped—the only Bishop known to reside in his diocese and do the work he was paid to do: then a man dressed as a farmer, who had refused the admittedly ridiculous costume which the Tiers État wore when last the States-General met, before Henry of Navarre had been long in his grave, before Philadelphia was more than a grazing-ground for bison.

The King's speech was applauded, but Marie-Antoinette again met nothing but cold silence. She still looked steadily back, with the heron's feather nodding proudly over her face. Mr. Gouverneur Morris would have liked to clap her, begged his neighbours in the gallery to join him in giving some sort of welcome to their Queen. His efforts grew all the more strenuous when he looked down at her again and thought he saw a tear glistening in her eye. He was quite unsuccessful: he met only sneers or the cold shoulder that Established Opinion turns to generous eccentricity. The gallery, if it had any acclamations to spare, was reserving them for the end of the King's Speech (M. Necker was responsible for its flowery emptiness) and the beginning of M. Necker's own, more business-like oration.

Gouverneur Morris soon forgot about the Queen. She looked

impatient, longing to be off, rather than truly in distress. Morris had heard enough gossip in the *salons* to permit himself a mental smile. Count Axel Fersen, perhaps by some self-denying arrangement between himself and her, had spent these last critical months with his regiment at Valenciennes, on the Belgian frontier. Probably one or the other of them had found the strain too great, or decided that it was unwise to undergo private self-denials when public affairs demanded all faculties unimpaired. Mr. Morris guessed that the Royal Swedes were already under care of an understrapper or adjutant, that there was a horse in some Versailles stable that was enjoying well-earned corn after an exhausting ride from the frontier. That would certainly explain the Queen's impatience. But Mr. Morris had not come to gather more fodder for Gossip: he had come to listen to M. Necker's speech.

He was an American, for all his minor eccentricities. He shared his countrymen's opinion that Money was at the bottom of half the troubles on this competitive planet. There was little doubt in his mind that, if old King Louis XV (that most un-Biblical patriarch) had really made his *bon mot* about 'After me the deluge', then he was thinking in fiscal rather than theological terms. The effects of his own thriftlessness had been swollen by a hundred other downpours and leakages, some avoidable and damnable, some apparently beyond any man's power to build dyke or devise culvert against them; but the French—strange as their social habits might be—had at least had the sense now to entrust their Ark to a Noah who knew the meaning of money, to a business man and banker, an able writer on the problems of State Finance.

The King and Queen sat down. M. Necker rose with a bundle of papers in his hand. Gouverneur, so far as the seating allowed, settled himself down in comfort to enjoy an intellectual treat. He was sure that the French would learn much from M. Necker's opening speech to the States-General. He even hoped that they would learn the same kind of lessons as he himself had tried to teach the American public in his speeches to Congress, his tracts on Political Economy.

He was sadly disappointed. He learnt nothing at all. M. Necker in person was as flowery and as empty as M. Necker

speaking through royal lips; he delivered his nothingnesses with the gesture and emphasis of a second-rate actor. Then when he came to something more solid, he suddenly decided that he was too tired to speak and asked the King for leave to let a clerk read the rest of his speech. The clerk read. Gouverneur Morris knitted his brows to listen. The clerk read for close on three hours. Some of what he read seemed good, though still flowery. Some of it needed thinking about. Some of it seemed the most irritating nonsense. But the audience clapped it all.

Gouverneur Morris, who had eaten nothing since five o'clock that morning, was heartily glad when the clerk at last sat down, the applause reached its climax and M. Necker smiled his final acknowledgment. His thoughts were almost entirely set on the dinner to which he could now betake himself. But it warmed his heart to see that when the Queen rose to go, some of his neighbours in the gallery started a cheer that was taken up in several parts of the house. She curtsied in acknowledgment, graciously enough; if there were still a suspicion of glitter in her eye—Mr. Morris was too far off to see clearly—it could hardly be a tear of humiliation at her failure to win over her husband's people.

IT WAS NOT A TEAR OF HUMILIATION: she was not acknowledging her failure as a Queen. But Mr. Morris had guessed woefully wrong in his diary when he imagined her despising and wishing for revenge upon the *canaille*, when he imagined all kinds of curious things going on beneath the heron's plume while her husband and her husband's minister gave tongue. She had not listened to M. Necker, nor to the interminable drone of the reading clerk. Now that she had escaped from them, she made all possible haste, changing her official robe for the first dress that offered, running headlong downstairs to the coach that waited in the courtyard. Past the gilded railings she drove, through the Place D'Armes to the Meudon road. Louis must follow her as soon as he could manage: politics would hold him back for an hour or two yet. Even Axel was forgotten, far away at Valenciennes, or if he

were remembered, it was only as a distant islet of comfort in an Ocean of Despair. The little Dauphin was at Meudon. He was now nearly eight. He had watched the procession yesterday from a window in Versailles. Last night he had been sent to a healthier, less crowded place. He had seemed so much better of late years, and Marie-Antoinette, strong daughter of robust parents, had refused to coddle her boy or believe that there was any real danger. She believed it now, though the doctors were quarrelling about its cause. They agreed in one thing: it was very doubtful if the Dauphin would ever watch another procession: it was doubtful if he would leave Meudon again, save for St. Denis and the Royal tombs of France.

It was the fourth of May when the King and Queen presided at the *Menus* and listened to interminable M. Necker. On the fourth of June, Louis sat in tears at Meudon, while his wife knelt before him, alternately burying her face in his lap and rocking her whole frame in anguish. She cried to God that He could not take away this child, this only one of her jewels that the world had not besmirched and bespattered. If she lost him, she would no longer be herself, no longer know how to be Queen or continue her efforts to recover the ground she had so strangely lost. She would be numb and blind. She would be Marie-Antoinette no more. But, for all her prayers, very early on that June morning, at one hour after midnight, God had taken him away.

MR. GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, for all his disappointment at Necker, found Versailles a most interesting place to visit. He had still to come down by coach from Paris: lodgings at Versailles were a terrible price, with the whole Court in attendance at the Palace and six hundred members from the provinces needing shelter and entertainment after their long debates. The guest-books of the Versailles lodging-houses were crowded with names that were already famous—Mirabeau's in particular, now that he had lived down his evil reputation and pleased Mr. Morris by showing, through the midst of his rhetoric, his harping on high principle, that he

knew the root of trouble to lie in high finance. There were other names not famous yet, though they would soon be heard of on both sides of the Atlantic. Danton was a member, Marat and Camille Desmoulins: Talleyrand sat among the clergy and St. Just with the nobles. Some of them came from obscure corners of France, and, like Mr. Morris, they enjoyed the sights of Versailles.

In the Queen's absence her apartments at the Palace were open to the public, even her gardens at Trianon. Mr. Gouverneur Morris, walking there with Madame De Montroisseux and her friends, acknowledged Marie-Antoinette's good taste, while deploring the affected simplicity of the dairy and duckpond where she had played milkmaid with her ladies.

He noticed that several members of the States-General, representatives of the Tiers État, were also walking in the gardens. One, a small, lean man with cold but brilliant eyes, seemed to be peering at Trianon itself, asking another why they were not allowed into the pocket Palace. Mr. Morris followed them as they strolled, leaving the ladies to saunter. He was eager to learn what provincial members might have to say of their Queen's Palace, or of Marie-Antoinette herself.

"She has plenty to conceal," one of them was saying. "Have you not heard of the room she had set with diamonds in the wainscot, or the other one where even the fireplace was solid gold? What would your good constituents at Arras say if you went home and told them that you had actually seen the way in which their hard-earned money is squandered? No, she is wise to keep us out of Trianon! And no doubt you have been told about the secret stairs she had made to her bedroom, so that——"

Mr. Morris had heard enough. In any case the two deputies were walking faster now, and he could not keep up with them on his wooden leg. The fellow, the windbag that did all the talking, was of no interest, but his lean companion had an interesting face. He looked as if he was believing all that he was told, not out of stupidity or ignorance (he looked intelligent enough), but because some fanaticism prompted him to absorb all that fed its flame.

Mr. Morris was half ashamed of feeling so much interest, but

he could not help drawing from his pocket a little booklet he had bought in the street, giving the names of all the deputies. As he stumped back towards the lawn where the ladies strolled, he looked to see who was representing Arras at the States-General. 'Maximilien De Robespierre, attorney of the said town,' he read; it meant nothing to him till he suddenly remembered that he had seen it in print before—on the title-page of a pamphlet in which this Robespierre had argued against Capital Punishment.

"But I'd wager twenty dollars to an ounce of tobacco," Mr. Morris told himself as he limped off to rejoin the ladies, "that I'll never hear of it again."

II

"ANYTHING MORE?" ASKED COLONEL FERSEN, "anything the Major can't deal with, after I've gone?" It was afternoon, and he was sitting in the little regimental office at Valenciennes. The Sergeant that stood beside him put a second bundle of papers upon the desk.

"I'd like your signature to these, Monsieur," he said, "if it's not too much trouble."

Fersen glanced up at him, suspecting an implied reproof: absentee colonels must be a sore trial to sub-officers, especially sub-officers who are seldom or never permitted to leave the garrison-town themselves. But the man was inscrutable—short of stature, grey-moustached, seamed and sunburnt. His piercing little French eyes were fixed on the young private, who was awkwardly shaking sand from a pewter castor over the recently-signed documents.

Fersen picked up his pen again. "I shall not be away long, this time," he said. "It's merely to make arrangements for moving later. And it isn't a pleasure trip, Sergeant! Judging by the news, things are getting serious in Paris." He glanced at another paper. "What's this? Forage? Oh, yes. For this autumn? And this is the Strength Return. 'His Majesty's Regiment of Royal Swedes. Lille: born at Lille: Arras: Besançon:—not a single Swede amongst us, except the Colonel!'"

"There's one private, Monsieur," said the Sergeant, "that was born in a place called Glas-gow. I don't know if that's in Sweden or Switzerland."

"Neither, I'm afraid, Sergeant. We ought to get him a transfer to the Royal Scottish Archers—except that he'd be the only Scot among them! And they haven't handled a bow for two centuries. What a long way things go back in this Army!"

"Yes, Monsieur." The Sergeant was clearly uninterested. "And this is the usual one about pay, Monsieur."

"I suppose you mean the usual absence of pay! I've every sympathy with the men on that score. I suppose I shall have to have a talk to M. Necker when I get to Versailles." He pulled a wry face at himself in the little spotted mirror that unaccountably hung between a seedy-looking tea-cup and an upside-down portrait of the prophet Jeremiah, on the wall of the regimental office; he did not much relish his proposed interview with the Minister of Finance.

"It's not for me to say, Monsieur," answered the Sergeant stiffly, "but I've an idea that it is not so much M. Necker you will have to talk round as the six hundred gentlemen of this States-General affair they've called. M. De La Fayette is one of them, I believe. He's a soldier, Monsieur: he's seen service. Why doesn't he get up and tell 'em it's no good talking about the state of France while you don't pay your soldiers? If only they saw their money regularly, Monsieur, it would stop the nonsense—some of the nonsense they're beginning to talk."

"M. De La Fayette," began Fersen impatiently, "is too——" He checked himself, remembering what audience he was addressing; the young private had already begun to listen, open-mouthed. He looked at his watch, counting the hours to Versailles, though not exactly to M. Necker's lodgings. Then he picked up his pen again.

"I'm afraid," he said, as it began to squeak over the paper, "that the six hundred gentlemen will be difficult to persuade until there's some danger of a war. And I've heard no talk of that—unless you've been arranging one in the Sergeants' Mess."

Almost before the words were out of his mouth he was bitterly regretting them. "We don't talk politics in *our* Mess, Monsieur," answered the Sergeant, and then turned in wrath upon his subordinate. "What are you doing?" he said sharply to the young private, "putting a dirty thumb on the Colonel's documents? Off to the cookhouse with you, and wash your hands! Quick now and shut the door behind you!" He took the sand-caster from him, drove him from the room, and returned to the desk to push another document, with pardonable officiousness, in front of his Colonel.

Fersen signed meekly, wondering how to repair his error.

The Sergeant preserved his impassive silence until the work was finished, and then picked a paper out of the file. "I'm afraid he smudged this one, Monsieur," he said.

"Yes. He's a careless lad. He deserved what you said to him."

"Careless! When I was a recruit, Monsieur, I was told that, once my duty was finished, my time was my own and the King wasn't my master any more. But these young fools don't make any difference between duty and off-time. They're thinking of their own affairs when they get up in the morning, and they go to bed thinking of their own affairs. And the King can wait! . . . Will there be anything more, Monsieur, before you go?"

"No. I think not. Nothing the Major can't deal with. Unless——" Fersen pushed back his chair and stared out through the grimy window into the barrack-yard beyond, dusty under the July sun.

"I suppose, Sergeant," he said, "you've seen great changes in the Army since you were a recruit. All the same, you know, each fresh batch always seems worse than the last. The more one learns oneself, the more difficult it is to believe that the new generation isn't more ignorant than the one before it."

"Yes, Monsieur. That's true, Monsieur." The Sergeant still stood stiffly by the desk. "But it isn't ignorance now. It's knowing too much. Things are happening that—— But I needn't worry Monsieur with them. He will have enough to trouble him in Paris."

Fersen rose, walked to an open cupboard that bulged with dog's-eared papers, and swung slowly round to face the Sergeant. He was wondering how best to break through the hedge of Routine that separated them and make him talk about what was weighing on both their minds.

"The news from Paris is bad," he said, opening a round-about approach. "Not that the Bastille is of any importance. I gather they found it practically empty and only had the pleasure of cutting the throats of a few harmless pensioners. But the fact that they could do that unpunished, the fact that they could loot the Arsenal for arms to do it with——! I simply cannot understand what the troops round Paris were doing."

"If they are anything like the troops——" began the Sergeant, and then stopped short, gnawing his grizzled little moustache.

"Anything like the troops here?" echoed Fersen, feeling he was getting a little nearer. "Is there something you wanted to tell me about my Royal Swedes?"

"No, not exactly, Monsieur. Nothing that Monsieur does not know already. But I cannot help wishing that you were not—that you could be both here with us and in Paris at the same time."

"I'm afraid that's impossible, Sergeant."

"I know that, Monsieur. I know you have other—duties. Perhaps you can tell us, Monsieur, whether there is any truth in one of the stories we heard from Paris? They say that before anything happened, a crowd went round to that foreigner's exhibition, the waxwork show, and borrowed two of his wax heads. They say they carried them round the streets in procession, like we carry the flag when we're recruiting."

"I heard the story, too. I think it's true. One of the busts was M. Necker's." Fersen turned to fasten and lock the cupboard. "Some of the people in Paris," he said, "think a good deal of M. Necker."

"Yes, Monsieur. I believe they do—still. But the other one. Is it true that it was M. D'Orléans?"

"I believe so. What of it?" Fersen turned back, pocketing his keys. He saw that the Sergeant had not moved, but that a new look had come into his face. "What is it?" he asked. "Hadn't you better tell me?"

There was a pause. The Sergeant fidgeted on his feet, and then suddenly relaxed his military posture. "It's the men, Monsieur," he answered. "I've seen discontent, mutiny even, back in the old days. But the ideas they get hold of nowadays—only the good God knows where they come from. . . . The worst of it is, Monsieur, so many of them can read!"

"That's certainly serious!" Fersen could half guess what was coming and knew it was his duty to make light of it—so long as he could. "I've just signed the year's return of Defaulters in the regiment. I hope you're not going to keep me back in Valenciennes in order to submit a list of the Scholars!"

"No, Monsieur." The Sergeant was evidently in no mood for irony. "Maybe the Major can keep an eye on what I mean, while you're in Paris. Maybe things would be better if only there was a war coming. Some of these young fools would be easier to deal with if they'd ever seen a battle."

"You've seen—how many? Let me see—how long have you been in the service?"

"Forty years next March, Monsieur. I enlisted as a drummer-boy. I remember there was talk then—if you'll excuse my mentioning it—of a Duke of Orleans trying to make himself over-popular with the men. His father had been Regent—all but King. His son—— Well, Monsieur, I said some of the men could read. I've heard 'em at it, telling each other what's in the circulars that come by mail from Paris. And someone must pay for the writing of 'em, and the printing of 'em. There's some written about a Constitution, or some such name as that. And there's some that just say we need a change of King."

"I see." Fersen realised it was time to be grave now: it was certainly useless to try and laugh it off. "I'm glad you reported it, Sergeant. But perhaps it's a good thing I'm going to—where the mails come from. There are things that can best be reported at Headquarters, and stopped at the source, if it's not too late to stop them."

"That's for you to say, Monsieur." The Sergeant drew himself erect again. "But if you put it that way, Monsieur, I'm glad I did speak. I was only once in Paris: I couldn't afford more than the two days. I remember I walked into the garden of the Palais Royal; that's M. D'Orléans' place, isn't it, Monsieur? And I didn't like what I saw there."

Fersen nearly smiled again. "I don't think," he said, "you can hold M. D'Orléans responsible for all the riff-raff in the Palais Royal. I'm afraid you're prejudiced, Sergeant."

"Yes, Monsieur." It was clear that certain prejudices would continue to be cherished. "The painted women, of course, you can't keep them out of anywhere. But the jockeys in their English clothes! And someone once told me M. D'Orléans was a Freemason. I never could see, Monsieur, that this Freemasonry business was anything more or less than witchcraft."

"Have it your own way, Sergeant," said Fersen, taking his hat and cloak from a peg. "I'll remember to keep an eye on the jockeys and the Freemasons while I'm in Paris. I'm leaving you and the Major to keep an eye on my Royal Swedes. Good-bye till next week, or next month—and then I am afraid it may be good-bye for a long time!"

He was not long in getting to horse. He wanted to make as many stages as possible before nightfall. He did not speculate much on the disaffection among his soldiers: it was serious enough, though the root of the trouble lay elsewhere: the King might have no army left soon. His cousin might or might not be plotting to reap the benefit; if he were, he would almost certainly be disappointed. But it was queer how the blind instincts of uneducated men often pointed in the same direction as the intelligence of their betters.

He cleared his mind of Valenciennes and its problems before the town was well out of sight behind him. He thought of what lay in front—the many friends, the one friend, whom he might see to-morrow. For good or ill, a time was coming when such friendships would be tested.

So far as he could judge from her letters, the loss of her son had struck her numb. She was certainly unable to grasp what was happening at Versailles, what was happening in France. She would have to grasp, soon, that she had another son, a new Dauphin, when Liberty—or perhaps M. D'Orléans—might at any moment find an inconvenience. There would be scoundrels enough even in the new and wonderful France which was still expected to arise out of the autumn mists of talk, the decaying leaves that fluttered so fast from France's ancient and long-neglected trees. The strong oak of Monarchy still stood unthreatened—even if a large number of the six hundred talkers were already attempting to hang caps of Liberty on its twigs. But if an axe were being whetted anywhere in secret, it would be to shore through, not only Monarchy but the lives of a man, a woman and the little son that was left them.

THE ROAD SEEMED MORE CROWDED than usual, the bulk of the travellers making towards the frontier. At the first

post-house there was so much hubbub that he decided to ride on another stage before supping. He did not even dismount, merely ordering a glass of wine to be brought out to him.

There was a huge coach blocking the court-yard of the post-house: the coat-of-arms on its door had been recently smeared out with sticky black paint: its shafts stood empty, awaiting the new relay of horses. Someone was scolding the post-master in the high and irritable voice that so often conceals a rising panic.

"How much longer?" Someone was saying, "I tell you I must be at the frontier immediately—immediately! If you knew who I was, you'd stir your stumps, you great ugly lout! If those horses aren't harnessed in before two minutes, I'll—you'll be sorry for it."

Fersen sat rigid a moment, and then gently swung his heels against the sides of his horse; he manœuvred the beast quietly to the near-side window, reached out to the leather curtain, and pulled it sufficiently open to peep in. "M. L'Inconnu!" he said with as irritating a politeness as he could muster, "if you want him to stir his stumps, why don't you tell him who you are?" Then he shook his reins and trotted out on to the high road, leaving someone else to drink and pay for his wine.

One glance had been sufficient to confirm the evidence of his ears. It was M. D'Artois who was in such a hurry to reach the frontier, M. D'Artois who was leading what might soon be a considerable army of *émigrés*.

Among them, doubtless, would be numbered many who had counselled the King to call his States-General, many who had hesitantly applauded its gathering as the start to a New Age. The King's ship was now launched on perilous seas, whether towards undreamt-of glory or inevitable wreck. But one rat—and he the King's own brother—had evidently decided not to take the risk of the voyage.

III

"NO, NO, NO!" SAID KING GUSTAV. "I will not take refuge at Svartholm!" He looked at his captains and admirals with wide womanish eyes in which there was no hint of surrender. "I took refuge before, in Viborg Bay, and the result was that I had nothing to eat except cabbage and salt fish for more than three weeks. I am very sorry, gentlemen, but my digestion will not stand another three. We hammered our way out of Viborg Bay: we can hammer it out of Svensksund. If everyone does his duty, we might still be bombarding St. Petersburg before August."

There was a rustle of uniforms and a scraping of boots round the Council Table. It was cramped enough in the cabin of the *Amadis*, the little Royal yacht; but some of the company felt themselves far enough from the King's end of the table to start muttering to each other. The hammering of Viborg had been a painful affair, and they were all inclined to blame Gustav for the losses it had entailed rather than admire him for a successful escape. The fact that he had exposed his own life, that he had stood giving cool orders while the sea round his yacht was churned to foam by Russian cannon-balls, and its decks ran red with blood—all this made things worse rather than better.

"Your Majesty seems determined to reject all expert advice," said one of the boldest of the mutterers. "Your Majesty seems content to lose his fleet, his reputation and possibly his life. But we——"

"Nothing can be done without risk!" interrupted the King, "and the expert advice is not quite unanimous." He smiled at the young foreigner who sat silent at his elbow.

"If Your Majesty would listen while I finish my sentence! Our humble opinion is that, should Your Majesty attempt the impossible and be killed in this foolhardy action, we, the admirals and captains of the Navy, will be left to face the Riksdag, to face all Sweden, and bear the responsibility for the inevitable disaster. What answer can we give? How can we

explain that we were over-ruled? We have ourselves to think of, Your Majesty, our careers, our wives and children."

Gustav's eyes narrowed. "There are some sentences which would be better left unfinished," he said. "Some sentences that I would rather not listen to. If the worst were to happen, you can tell Sweden, you can certainly tell the Riksdag, that the campaign has failed because for years now, the Navy has been starved of money, ruined by the sloth and corruption of Swedish officials. You can put the blame on me, if you like. I only know that when I sent Royal officials down to the Carlskrona dockyards they found no Navy at all, only a mass of indiscipline, bribery and Treason. Baron Mauritz Armfelt had stories to tell that should bring a blush even to the cheeks of 'experts!' The ships—your ships, gentlemen—in such neglect and disrepair as would disgrace a village ferry-boat: your sailors mutinous for lack of an officer's care: your hospitals stinking with pestilence and crowded with unburied corpses. I have said Treason, and I mean it. A certain class of my subjects failed to get their way in the last Riksdag. Their sons and brothers at Carlskrona took revenge by allowing the Swedish Navy to rot to pieces in time of war. Again I say, blame me for not sending Baron Armfelt earlier, at the beginning instead of the end of winter. But I had other matters to see to—Danish invasion, the Russian armies in Finland. Some of the blame must rest on those who deliberately neglected their duty because their King was too busy elsewhere to detect and punish their crimes."

He sat back, leaving silence along the table. He exchanged a few inaudible words in French with the foreign captain, who nodded, rose and ducked his way out of the cabin door.

"If Captain Smith understood our language," said the King, "I would not have spoken as I did, in his presence. But if you wish to reply, you may feel freer to do so now that he has gone. I have his formal opinion for engaging the Russian fleet to-day."

Captain Sidney Smith understood rather more Swedish than he allowed Swedes to know. He emerged upon the deck of the yacht with a tight smile on his lips. And the first thing he looked for was the weather.

He seemed satisfied with his survey. There was a driving mist, but the wind seemed to be freshening; the waves were beginning to cluck round the sides of the *Amadis*; there were even small white horses tossing their manes up the sides of the hundred little islands of rock, upon which King Gustav, partly by Captain Smith's advice, had insisted that batteries should be built and lookouts maintained. Southward, already visible through the scudding streaks of mist, loomed the shadowy mass of the Russian fleet. Captain Sidney Smith did not for a moment regret that he had given his opinion for fighting it, rather than taking refuge from it at Svartholm.

He was young, and not yet famous. He had an unusually high opinion of his rather unusual talents. He was certainly not in the least disturbed at being politely dismissed from Council—after his presence there had done all that was wanted to bring certain gentlemen to a sense of their responsibilities. The King would certainly get his way now, and with very reasonable chances of victory. Captain Smith smiled his tight smile, sniffing the rising wind. He knew how to keep his mouth shut: he only permitted himself an occasional letter to London with acid reflections on the "prudent gentlemen whose humble remonstrances are absolute refusals, and who oppose the word 'impossible' to every plan of enterprise".

He was to know something of enterprise, and something of apparent impossibilities, in the course of his unconventional career: he was one of those Englishmen (without whom England would be a petty province) who know when a salutary Routine has become a dangerous and a shameful Sloth, when men must either disobey orders or see their country betrayed. There was another such among his contemporaries who would soon be coming to the Baltic—to turn a blind eye to signals from his superior officers outside the roads of Copenhagen. Captain Sidney Smith had a less brilliant future awaiting him, though there would one day be men who held that he did as much as Nelson himself to save the world from the despotic backwash of France's democratic revolution: at least he barred it from the conquest of that eastern continent where despotism is native. But he was young still, he had not yet heard the name of Napoleon, and

(if he could already plan desperate defences) he only knew of Acre as a place on Sunday School maps of the Holy Land. Meanwhile he had defied the Admiralty in London in order to watch the rather amateurish efforts of Swedish and Russian seamen to batter each other to death along the Finnish coast. For Sidney Smith was nothing if not English, and true seamanship was to him an exclusive perquisite of the English race.

There were still murmurings, and even thumpings on the table, down below in the King's cabin. They would have to cease soon. The prudent gentlemen would have to get back to their ships and do something about the black mass to southward, beating up towards Svensksund. It would soon be too late to run for Svartholm, and King Gustav's battle would become inevitable.

They were still grumbling when they emerged into the sunlight and climbed down into their cutters. But Gustav, rejoining Smith by the taffrail, was as carefree as a schoolboy. Gustav was generally happy when he could have his own way.

It was July 9th and the Russian admiral had chosen the day with reason. On another 9th of July, twenty years ago, Catherine had become Tsarina: the anniversary of her accession meant more to her than the anniversary of her birth, which had been German and obscure: she would be celebrating it at Tsarskoe Selo, a hundred miles away, and would be glad to hear that the same day had seen the final destruction of Gustav's impudent fleet. They had once been 'Gus' and 'Kitty' to each other, before claws were unsheathed. Now he was a 'crowned mountebank' whose subjects she could seduce by money and intrigue, whose Finland she coveted for Russia, whose fleet could be blown off the water by the heavier armament that was beating up towards Svensksund.

It was half-past nine when the first gun spoke—from the little *Amadis* in the centre of the line. By ten o'clock there was such a thunder along the whole line, from Musala to the isle of Lächmasari, as might almost be audible in Tsarskoe Selo, telling the Tsarina that the battle had begun.

There were English adventurers on both sides, and whenever a Russian ship seemed better handled than the rest, Captain Sidney Smith felt that she must have an English captain or at

least an English adviser on board. But he had little time to speculate on such matters; the *Amadis*, between two ships of the line, was already at hammer and tongs with the floating batteries of the Russians.

The mist had not cleared, and now the smoke came to double the pall of invisibility over the contending navies. By the thumping and pounding to westward, the Russians must be launching their heaviest attack of gunboats along the coast of Musala. But the wind and sea were beginning to rise, and they might soon be regretting their drive, so close to the rocky ledges and King Gustav's improvised land batteries: gunnery is unequal between *terra firma* and a heaving deck. The thumping and pounding seemed to move southward: the Swedish right, instead of holding its own against the main attack, must be beginning to advance: soon its fire was coming from such an angle as to rake the Russian centre, and open a way for the ships of the line that thundered beside the *Amadis*. Gustav, calm and grave as a judge, came close to Sidney Smith and raised both hands to trumpet in his ear: "No more salt fish and cabbage!" he roared, and walked away again without a smile.

Still the sea rose and rose. The waves, spotted with cannonballs, striped with spars and corpses, began to beat heavily upon the ships, to foam and churn around the rocks of the archipelago. There would soon be no need of gunboats to hold back the Russian advance to eastward, between Sandskär and its sister isles. A pinnace skimmed away from the side of the *Amadis*, bearing a message to the ships on the Swedish left. They were ordered to leave the enemy floundering, to make for the narrow strait between Kutsalo and Lächmasari, and sweep round behind the Russian rear.

It was the death-blow to all hopes of reporting a triumph to Tsarskoe Selo. The Russian line began to fall back before it was too late. But it was already too late for two floating batteries, five frigates and sixty smaller ships. They were sinking already, they were being captured or burnt as they attempted to veer round and head for safety. The Swedes had lost four ships and barely two hundred men: but seven thousand Russian were lying dead on their decks, or tossing in the storm-lashed

sea, or creeping up the cliffs of rocky islands, whence they could be rounded up for capture and the prison camp.

THERE IS LITTLE ENOUGH NIGHT OFF FINLAND in July. The firing had ceased by ten; there was no need for the gilded lanterns that swung and clanked along the ceiling of King Gustav's cabin. "I hope I shall not have to hold another Council," he said to Captain Smith. "It's almost as embarrassing to say 'I told you so' as it must be to listen to it." He picked up a pen from the bucking table. "The worst of being a King is that you've no sooner finished with one thing than another becomes equally pressing. And Long Axel will be wanting some more instructions soon."

"I should have thought," answered the Englishman, "that Your Majesty had earned a little rest to-day."

"Perhaps. But it's not a question of what I've earned; it's a question of what I can afford. I hope my dear friends the Turks are getting on as well in the Black Sea as we are in the Baltic. In any case, I think my dear enemy Kitty will be glad to make a peace now, and not quite on the same terms as she was contemplating this morning! And then I can turn to what really matters."

Captain Smith frowned his disapproval. All foreigners were flippant. If only they would weigh their words properly, they might hope to compete successfully with the English: but they never would, and England's superiority was permanently beyond challenge.

"And all this?" he said, indicating many square miles of sea, many still unfinished tragedies on rock or water, with a slight movement of his finger. "Does not this matter?"

"To Sweden—yes. To Europe—very little. Nothing matters now except France. Even England will have to see that soon; she may find it necessary to use her Navy—to use your services, Captain Smith. She will not discover the necessity just yet. But I am not English, and I consider the matter urgent."

"So that is why you are writing to your ambassador in Paris before you get your sleep?"

"That is why I am not writing to my ambassador in Paris. He's a young fool himself, he's married another one and he's on the wrong side in French politics. I am writing to someone else; and I called him—what I did, so that you would not know to whom I was referring."

"Then, if Your Majesty will permit me to go to bed——" Captain Smith saluted formally and made his way along the table edge to the heaving door of the cabin. "But I think," he said, as he departed, "that Your Majesty is wrong about England. I don't think we need be much concerned about French affairs, nor about anything that might come out of them."

"Humph," said King Gustav to the closing door.

OCTOBER HAD BROKEN RAW AND WET, and there was Hunger abroad. Half Paris accused the Court or the aristocrats of emptying the bakers' shops in order to fill their own pockets. The Court was sure that it was the revolutionaries who had created the scarcity for their own ends—unless it was M. D'Orléans, quick to adopt any device for embarrassing his cousin's government. Meanwhile the rain fell, the wind blew chill and Paris grew hungrier and hungrier.

Paris was up betimes, in spite of the weather. Those who were responsible for order in Paris had to rise early if they were to nip riot in the bud. It was barely six when M. De La Fayette, commander of the National Guard, was seen clattering up and down the streets on the back of his white horse.

Not that M. De La Fayette had exactly risen early: he had not been to bed at all. There are several tricks by which rogues and intriguers can render an honest man powerless in times of trouble. If the honest man happens to be exceedingly popular, the safest way is to give him some office, not too important, which keeps him so busy that he had no time to notice roguery, or put his spoke in the wheels of intrigue. If he is extremely conscientious (and inordinately vain) the trick works well. M. De La Fayette was too democratically-minded to refuse a responsible post offered him by the People—or by that small clique who shouted most loudly that they were acting in the People's name. And having accepted it, he was far too high-principled to discharge his duties with anything except tireless zeal and heartbreaking effort. He had saved hundreds of lives by personal effort, by haranguing mobs (sometimes with a naked sword in his hand) until they stood shamefaced, and let go the victims they were dragging to lamp-posts or menacing with butchers' knives. He had flattered Paris until it almost believed itself as eager for Law, Order and Liberty as he was himself. He had sat at his desk in the *Hôtel de Ville* all through the night, in the hope that paper-work

might obviate further necessities for drawing his sword. But Hunger can sweep away the strongest barriers of eloquence, the signing of the most mountainously-piled documents. M. De La Fayette, trotting through the streets in the drizzle of dawn, was trying not to acknowledge, at the back of his exhausted brain, that Paris was completely out of hand.

There were crowds and queues outside every baker's shop: there were men regaling the damp watchers for bread with tales of flour thrown into the Seine, loaves sent away from the Capital in order to increase somebody's profit, intrigues at Versailles for starving the Revolution into surrender. It was useless to stop and argue. It was probably dangerous to do so, though danger had never deterred M. De La Fayette from obeying the call of duty. But it was clearly urgent to get to the centre of things, to organise wholesale counter-measures against the threat of wholesale violence. M. De La Fayette wheeled his white horse away from the bakers' shops and trotted towards the *Hôtel de Ville*. It was nearly nine when he came to his decision, and time was precious. He was too anxious to recognise friends whom he had known in America, that gradually receding scene of his former glories. He passed Fersen as he rode, without turning his head. He did not even notice a one-legged American, with whom he had dined a few nights ago, now making his way along the pavement of the *Rue des Petits-Champs*. Mr. Gouverneur Morris gave him a wave of the walking-stick, but the white horse trotted on. La Fayette was inclined to be amongst those who suspected Orléanist work behind the famine, behind the threatened insurrection; and those who worked against the swift subtleties of M. D'Orléans had no time to stop and hob-nob with their acquaintance.

Mr. Morris was left unrecognised on the pavement. He merely lifted ironic eyebrows at the white horse receding down the street, and began to stump on again.

Mr. Morris had another oddity in his character that has not yet been mentioned. He was an American, and yet he did not regard M. De La Fayette as a great man. The opinion was based on a considerable knowledge of men, and a considerable knowledge of M. De La Fayette. One could not help liking the

Hero of Two Worlds, admiring him, even, for his single-minded energy. But one could understand why the Queen, for instance, disliked and distrusted him. And one could wonder—as one trod carefully along the *Rue des Petits-Champs*, trying to prevent one's wooden leg from slipping on the wet pavement—one could wonder how long it would be before the theoretically-minded Don Quixote on the white horse rode away in disgust and disillusionment from the turbid politics of Revolution.

Mr. Morris stepped into a shop doorway, shook the water off his soaked beaver hat, and went in to purchase some tobacco. He made a habit of buying odd ounces at odd shops, up and down Paris. It was an extravagance, since he had come to France on business connected with Tobacco, and could get his own supplies for little or nothing; but it gave him an insight into what small retailers were thinking and saying of the trade; and to know what the small retailer said and thought was no inconsiderable piece of knowledge when it came to bargaining with Ministers at Versailles.

He was unlucky in the *Rue des Petits-Champs*. The unwanted ounce was pushed unceremoniously into his hand. The shopkeeper, or rather the shopkeeper's wife, was in no mood for trade-gossip. She was already about to lock up her shop and devote her day to something other than tobacco-selling: its possible nature was foreshadowed by the ugly-looking axe that she had laid upon the counter, but snatched up again as if in fear that Mr. Morris had come to deprive her of her only available weapon.

"Murderers!" she said, before Mr. Morris had had time to start any conversation. "That's what they are, murderers! Stamping on our cockade and cheering that Austrian hussy! We're going to rout her out from there, and get her to Paris."

Mr. Morris raised polite eyebrows. "Oh?" he said quizzically, "and who exactly have they murdered?"

She gave him a look of the deepest suspicion, and then decided to forgive him—perhaps in virtue of the slight accent which proclaimed him foreigner in spite of his every effort to subdue it. "No one yet," she said resentfully, "but they'll cut all our throats if we don't act quick! Call themselves the Flanders Regiment! Soldiers all foreign scum, I'll be bound,

and officers all aristocrats. Swilling wine while we starve. I'll 'Flanders' them!"

She hacked at her own counter with the axe, making the clay-pipes jingle in their wooden trays. There was no sign of immediate starvation about her plump features, her extremely ample contours. But she was certainly frightened, and fear had no less certainly made her ferocious. She began to buckle the axe into a leather belt round her waist. It seemed an inadequate armament with which to attack a regiment of supposed foreigners or even kidnap a Queen. But her next speech showed that she prepared to lengthen rather than diminish the odds.

"And there's something else," she said, "that wants rummaging out of Versailles. That States-General—National Assembly or whatever its name is nowadays. Call themselves the representatives of the People! Why can't they do something to give the People bread? Do you know what they were talking about t'other night . . . same night as the officers' banquet? I've heard they were argufying whether or not to have a thing called a veto—a suspensive veto as they call it. Some say that a veto's a kind of brigand, but I know better than that. 'Suspensive' means 'hanging', doesn't it? Well it's my belief it's something they want to give the King so's he has the right to hang any of us just when he likes. That's what a man was saying at the corner of the street last night and I've a notion he was right. Them and their vetos! High time the lot of them came to Paris where they can't get up to any tricks! Why shouldn't the King and Queen live in the Tuileries across there?" She waved a fat hand across the road, towards the town Palace which the French Kings had long ago deserted for the more spacious air of Versailles. "It would be good for trade, wouldn't it?" she asked aggressively. "It would help poor people in Paris to live. And what's more we could keep an eye on them, King and Assembly and all, and see that they didn't vote each other vetos or rich banquets and spit on the People's Cockade!"

She had begun to come round her counter and advance upon Mr. Morris almost as if he were guilty of the insult to the National Emblem. He was not in the least dismayed by the

frontal attack, but could not help being distracted by movements in his rear. He had left the shop door open, and the sounds from the street made him turn to see what was happening. A crowd was marching through the drizzle, with pikes and scythes and swords. They were striking up a song—the *Ca ira*, so far as it was recognisable at all. They were led by a woman—or someone dressed as a woman, though the heavy boots seemed masculine enough, and the huge strides proclaimed a pair of legs to which skirts came as a surprise and an unaccustomed handicap. He, or she, turned back every moment or so to shepherd the ragged flock onwards, by waving a long butcher's knife and shout imprecations whose full meaning Mr. Morris was glad not to know.

He did not have much time to speculate on their finer shades of ingenuity, theological or physical. He suddenly found himself propelled violently out into the rain, heard the shop door bang behind him and saw his late informant waddling hurriedly up the street in the wake of the blasphemer. A minute later the ragged squadron had swung left and disappeared under the arches that led into the garden of the *Palais Royal*.

He was tempted to follow, if only to peep inside. The garden seethed with oratory, with smells of decaying vegetation and damp humanity. The streaming walls of the Palace echoed and re-echoed to the sound of Liberty, Equality and Bread, Bread, Bread. One excited speaker, hanging by one hand from the top of a tall window-sash, while his feet fumbled and slipped on the meagre outside sill, was managing to wave the other arm towards the centre of the City and yell "*Hôtel de Ville!*" above the hubbub.

Mr. Morris quickly turned back towards the *Rue des Petits-Champs*. He had had his fill of political observation that morning: he was still unshaken in his conviction that the French Soul was fundamentally monarchical. What could be more natural than that, at a moment of famine and panic, the people of Paris should want their King among them, should march out to Versailles and bring him back through the rain? It was only to be hoped, in view of the excitability of the French nature, that the King—and still more his Queen and

children—reached Paris in a reasonably undamaged condition.

Mr. Morris was beginning to get extremely wet, and it was quite clear that, on this particular morning, the *Palais Royal* was no place for an elderly gentleman with a wooden leg.

Mr. Morris turned back through the arches and made his way back to his own fireside with all the speed he could muster.

IT WAS IN THE RUE MONTMARTRE that Fersen had seen La Fayette ride by that morning. Fersen had lodgings in Versailles now, but he had spent the night, unexpectedly, in Paris. A certain milord Crauford had invited him to supper there: a certain Mrs. Sullivan, milord's Irish mistress, had prevailed on the handsome young Swede to accept their spare bedroom for the night. Eleonora Sullivan was a lady of quite exceptional attractions. She had exercised them already (with complete success and more than once) upon the susceptible Axel. It became apparent now, long before midnight, that she was eager to repeat the experience. She was perhaps growing a little tired of milord, in spite of his money; she was certainly making it clear to Axel, under milord's nose, that she would prefer sharing the spare bedroom to earning her keep. But Fersen had driven all her hopes away by talking the whole evening about Marie-Antoinette, her charms, her innocence and the dangers of her present position. When Crauford interrupted with enquiries about the King's veto and Fersen began to argue for its necessity (in a land threatened with the overthrow of all authority), Mrs. Sullivan had risen with a swirl of indignant skirts. "I'm going to bed," she said. "I prefer bed to gentlemen's politics!" And she had not waited to acknowledge the polite if perfunctory bow that Fersen found himself making to an angrily-slammed door.

He could have chuckled over the whole business as he rose early next day with a view to getting back to Versailles. But he was too worried to enjoy the joke properly, and there was soon cause to increase his anxiety. There was obviously something astir in the streets outside. He could even detect some suppressed news in the attitude of the servant who brought him coffee while he dressed, and stood meticulously folding the

embroidered nightshirt that milord Crauford had graciously lent his guest.

"Things looking bad already, Monsieur," he said. "They tried to get 'em to raise a rumpus last Sunday. They'll succeed to-day, I should say, after all that's come out about that banquet-business at Versailles. Perhaps you was there, Monsieur?"

"I was," said Fersen drily, "and I saw nothing to raise a rumpus about, as you call it."

He was not likely to forget that night, when the Officers' Mess of the King's Guard had followed ancient custom by inviting the newly-arrived gentlemen of the Flanders Regiment to dine. A great horseshoe of tables had been laid in the emptied auditorium of the Palace theatre. There had been good food and wine—perhaps too much of both. But there had been genuine enthusiasm too, long repressed and now glad of an outlet—the first thing since May or June that could be set against the daily exhibitions of revolutionary fervour in the streets, in the Palais Royal and in the debating hall of the Assembly. A few officers had been invited from the National Guard—the amateur body of City Militia that La Fayette commanded—but only such as were known to view the rising tide of Revolution with misgivings. These, too, had caught the ardour, unpinning the tricolour cockades from their hats to make room for the paper favours of Bourbon white that the watching ladies of the Court tossed down for them from the theatre boxes. None had been able to resist it when King Louis, regal for once, had stepped upon the stage, with his Queen, his daughter and the little Normandy whom they must now call Dauphin. Fersen could still hear the music ringing in his ears as it had when the orchestra struck up with *O Richard, O mon roi!*

"O Richard, King and Master,
By all the World betrayed!"

There had been two hundred gentlemen there that were not going to betray King Louis or his cause. Their swords had flashed out in whirling salute, their shouts of love and loyalty had made the building rock. No wonder Paris—so much of

Paris as was bent on destroying ancient loyalties—had gnashed vicious teeth at the news of the Versailles banquet. No wonder the newspaper scribblers and the sowers of slander had been busy with——

"After all, Monsieur," interrupted the servant, officiously removing the hardly-finished breakfast from Fersen's dressing-table, "after all, trampling on the National Cockade, spitting on it, even——"

"No one trampled on anything," said Fersen sharply, "and I am quite sure no one did anything so undignified as to spit. Will you please give me my hat and cloak?"

"Of course, you were there, Monsieur," grumbled the servant, "and I suppose you must know. All the same, they do say that there's no smoke without fire. If you didn't happen to notice——"

"I asked you for my hat and cloak," said Fersen, knowing that it was useless to argue against proverbs. "And here's something for you." He held out a piece of silver. "Thank you for a comfortable night's rest." He caught up his things and hurried out towards the stables.

The groom was not yet dressed, the horse still unsaddled. Fersen cursed him for a lazybones and, while he got slowly and discontentedly to work, walked out into the wet street.

It was filled with streams of people. They were not only foaming round the baker's shop at the corner; they were swirling up and down everywhere, talking and gesticulating to each other. Most of them were armed, and most seemed to be flowing towards the centre of the City, towards the *Hôtel de Ville*. When La Fayette rode by in the same direction, they shouted after him, half in appeal, half with something like insults.

It was all like a dream, though an exceedingly unpleasant one—shuttered shops, a man patently parading in women's clothes, the armed figures beneath those gaunt and towering houses, that seemed to nod towards each other as if they had some ghastly secret to share. Even the constantly overheard 'Veto' and 'Banquet at Versailles' seemed to be such talk as dreams might breed. 'Austrian harlot' and the Christian names of the woman he loved did something to awaken him to

a real life more cruel than the dream. But he still stood bewildered and bemused until a little bent old woman suddenly lurched up against him and then made a mocking curtsy, fixing him with gimlet eyes. "And do you know what I'm going to do with that?" she said suddenly, whipping a glittering knife—the only clean thing about her—from its sheath in her twisted stocking. "Do you know what I'm going to do with it, my pretty gentlemen? I'm going to slit up that fat belly of hers and pull the guts out, yard by yard, till we've got enough red to make cockades for the whole National Guard, the whole ten thousand of them. And what does M. De La Fayette think he is going to do about that?" she cackled with blackened gums.

Fersen, more than awake by now, had already turned away to run headlong into the stables. "You needn't dress!" he shouted to the groom. "I want your clothes myself." He was already stripping off his gold-laced coat, throwing his waistcoat after it on to a pile of straw, and beginning to tear off his silk stockings and breeches. This was no time for gentlemen to be pretty—not if they wanted to be any use to the ladies whom they loved. "Trousers and all!" he said, "and you can keep my clothes instead." He began to pull the rough grey shirt over the man's head. "Unless you'd like to sell them to Madame Sullivan," he said. "She might like them as a souvenir of a virtuous night!"

He was soon ready, soon as dishevelled and inconspicuous as half the crowd outside. If Revolution, which disclaimed artificialities and denounced shams, could hide men in women's garments for its own evil ends, then surely one who strove to keep the ancient masquerade afoot could borrow a guise in keeping with the grisly dance.

He would have to ride to it and through it, if he was to be in time. He might not be the only one on horseback, now that the drums were beating in the suburbs and little armies gathering to march in towards the centre of Paris, out towards Versailles and their unsuspecting victim.

They thought him a leader in the street, though he rode weaponless, his fashionable sword left behind upon the hay. They crowded behind him, hallooing and shouting vengeance

against her whom he rode to save. The mob grew thicker as he debouched from the *Rue Montmartre* upon the wide square of the *Halles*. Here a quarrel was raging—most of the stall-keepers refusing to march with the insurgents. The Queen was popular enough in the *Halles* and her enemies were gathering few recruits. One fishwife was shouting to them: "If you use our name for your mischief-making, we'll have a trial—that we will!—and put you in prison for defaming the 'Ladies of the Market!'" Talking of harlots, there were a large percentage of unashamedly professional ones among the insurgents, still flaunting last night's paint. And the women of the *Halles*, even the foul-mouthed ones, were nothing if not respectable.

It was all comic enough, had one had time to think it over. But there was no time to think anything over. Fersen, desperately trying to head his horse to the right, was being engulfed in the stream that flowed southward towards the *Hôtel de Ville*.

He had to give way at last, hoping for a better opportunity. He had to let his unasked-for following jostle him onwards, through the lashing rain, past the *Tour St. Jacques* and into the *Place de Grève*.

It was a whirlpool of faces and tossing pikeheads. The *Hôtel de Ville* rose like a group of slender and fragile rocks in the waves of savage fury. Not a window was unbroken. Somewhere inside those empty, staring frames, the Mayor Bailly would be trembling under a table, La Fayette running to and fro with his inaudible eloquence and worthless needle of a sword. At one of them a priest suddenly appeared, standing erect as if to bless the crowd below for a split second of fantastic ceremony. The next instant he had been pushed forward and was hurtling down upon their heads. He did not reach them. The rope they had tied round his neck cut short his fall with a sickening jar and left him dangling broken-necked above the pikeheads.

They were looting the armoury of the building. They were dragging out small cannon, handing muskets round to those who could press near enough the door, over the trampled corpses of such guards as Mayor Bailly had been able to parade. Already the shout of "Versailles! To Versailles!" was

becoming an audible thread in the vast and jumbled pattern of sound that filled the rain-soaked air. Fersen snatched a pike from the hands of an unwary neighbour and began to lay about him with its butt-end, bludgeoning a pathway for his horse. He struggled towards the west edge of the square, back towards the *Tour St. Jacques* and so for the bridge beneath *Notre-Dame*.

He got over it somehow. He got across the island and over to the South Bank. He must ride westward by one route or another. He must ride to Versailles. He must ride to her.

SHE WAS WITH ONE OF HER LADIES when his horse clattered through the Place D'Armes at Versailles and thundered along garden paths towards Trianon. It was not raining here, but it was so curiously mild that she was sitting out on the Terrace. Her companion—Madame D'Adhénar—was reading out a letter to her, a letter from M. De La Fayette. "Well," she said, as soon as it was finished, "so we have got a respite."

Madame D'Adhénar looked up in surprise, almost in pity. "But M. De La Fayette only says——" she began, "that is, he is trying not to frighten Your Majesty. But the information he gives——"

"I am not easily frightened," said Marie-Antoinette.

They had brought out two of her own chairs, with 'M.-A.' carved in the scroll-work of their backs. She was sitting in her plain dress of pale green, with the white *fichu* above. "Has my husband gone hunting?" she asked, with a half-listless air.

"Shooting, Your Majesty," answered Madame D'Adhénar. "Towards Meudon, I believe. I wish he had not gone."

"You know whose picture my husband keeps in his study?" asked the Queen, raising her eyes to the sombrely still foliage that overhung the garden. "He keeps Charles I of England—the one whose head was cut off. I don't know if M. De La Fayette has any portraits in his office at the *Hôtel de Ville*—except, of course, half a dozen of himself! But if there are any others, one of them at least should be Cromwell's."

Madame D'Adhénar pursed her lips. "May I ask," she

said, "why Your Majesty hates M. De La Fayette so?"

"You can certainly ask," replied the Queen, with an almost flippant manner, "but I very much doubt if I could answer. I'm a woman. Mayn't I have a whim now and then?"

"This one might cost you more than it is worth," said her companion. "M. De La Fayette is extremely conceited, but he's honest and he works hard. If he has ambitions, they are quite unconscious ones——"

"Mightn't that make them more dangerous?"

Madame D'Adhénar sighed and gave it up—or decided to try a new line of advance. "I don't understand," she said, "why, if Your Majesty does not trust him, you find his letter so reassuring. He is trying not to overstate the danger—trying, if you like, to exaggerate his own power to keep Paris quiet. But he says——"

"I heard," said the Queen. "Why must I repeat myself? We've a moment's respite. Give me a day or two to breathe in peace."

They had not heard the horse-hoofs, or had not noticed them. They knew nothing, until the side-gate of the garden creaked and Fersen came crunching up the gravel.

They might have taken him for a gardener but for the urgency upon his face. The Queen had barely time to rise, to whisper a scarce audible "Axel!" before he was close to them, panting from his ride.

"They're coming," he said. "I was with them—storming the *Hôtel de Ville*. Come to the Palace."

She stood pale, but firm. "When?" she said.

"Now," he answered. "Not a moment's respite."

She was not superstitious, but the inexplicable repetition of the phrase made her feel momentarily giddy, made her clutch suddenly at the chair-back. She gave Madame D'Adhénar one look, in which despair fought with a kind of apology. "And M. De La Fayette?" she asked quietly.

"Has lost his head for once. I can't blame him. His National Guard are being mustered. But the others will be here first."

She faltered forward a step and he caught her arm in his strong grasp, steadied her until she sank momentarily into the chair. She could not rest there, or at least not longer than was

necessary to order a carriage to take her up to the Palace, to send a galloper to Meudon, to the woods, for King Louis' shooting-party. There were no guards at Trianon, no possibility of defence. But the railings were tall and strong that fenced Versailles Palace from the Place D'Armes; the long line of the Royal Apartments could be garrisoned by the Flanders Regiment, the Royal Guards, even the Militia that La Fayette might yet bring up before the fighting began.

They made what disposition they could, while news came flocking in along the Paris road: most of it was for the best, slackening at least the need for urgency. The mob was being delayed by mud and rain: the mob had stopped to loot the bakers' shops and restaurants at Sèvres. Then came an item, neither good nor bad, that made the courtiers of Versailles wink noddingly to each other: the mob was being led by a jockey and a woman from the Palais Royal: both wore the colours of the Duc D'Orléans.

When King Louis rode in, he refused to be thrown into a panic. He was sure that things would blow over, irritated that his day of sport had been interrupted so early. When he heard that extra rounds of ammunition were being served out to the troops, he almost forbade it. "Didn't someone say," he asked, "that it was women that were coming? You can't shoot at women, you know."

The National Assembly was equally imperturbable. It sat in the *Salle des Menus Plaisirs*, a few hundred yards from the Palace, calmly discussing details of a new penal code. Only Mirabeau, with his huge head and his huge shoe-buckles, had sidled round to the President's chair and whispered something about an army of forty thousand that was marching upon Versailles.

One listened to Mirabeau these days. He had only to rise in the Assembly for men to sit upright and maybe change their life-long opinions. He could denounce La Fayette, he could make Necker ridiculous: popular idols were mincemeat when Mirabeau opened his ugly but impressive mouth. But his whispered "Forty thousand" failed to alarm Mr. President. Mr. President, rightly or wrongly, had got it into his head that Mirabeau was part of the Orléanist plot whereof the

mob represented another part. "The Assembly remains at its post," he said sharply.

"You'll be killed, Mr. President."

"So much the better, so long as they kill all of us—but *all*, do you understand? Affairs would proceed much better for our deaths."

Mirabeau sniggered and withdrew, applauding the President's wit. The debate on the Criminal Code proceeded. And within a few minutes the pike-bearers and the prostitutes were swarming into the Hall.

They shouted, in the abstract, for Bread. They shouted, more effectively, for wine, ham-sandwiches and pork-pies from a neighbouring restaurant. There were not forty thousand of them, perhaps not four thousand, but the party that had invaded the Assembly had soon sent terrified ushers scuttling for their picnic. They munched and swilled it among the deputies' seats. They danced on the President's platform, dragging a Bishop up there and covering his astonished face with their slimy kisses. The President had gone to ask King Louis for orders, and came back to find his Assembly half a menagerie and half a brothel. When he tried to reimpose order and read the King's gracious message to his good people of Paris, they merely yelled "No good! No good! That won't put bread into our mouths!"

The railings and the great gates kept their fellow-rioters away from the Palace. Behind these stood the Flanders Regiment, the mounted Guards with swords drawn. The rain fell pitilessly on the soldiers, on the poor, huddled ranks of the woebegone army from Paris. Inside the Palace, the King paced up and down, received deputations from the mob and thought it only reasonable that the good people of Paris should beg him to let them escort him to the Tuileries; it was only natural that they wanted their King to live amongst them, not in this distant and aristocrat-ridden Versailles. When courtiers came to tell him of coaches and horses ready to take him and the Queen to Rambouillet, to Fontainebleau, he toyed with the idea, but could not think it reasonable. "A King can't run away!" he muttered, marching up and down his echoing Council Room. "No, no. Not run away."

The crowd still howled outside, pressing against the railings, jeering or soliciting at the soldiers ranked within. Only one man spoke to them with quieter insistence. He had pushed his way to the front of the crowd, politely demanded entry through the great gates. He had a message for King Louis. He was going to tell him, most respectfully, that the whole business was quite simple: King Louis had just got to abdicate, and then there would be no more bother, no more bother at all.

Inside, in the room where King Louis walked and fretted, there were whispers that the National Guard was coming, that M. De La Fayette was riding in. M. De La Fayette would save them. Her Majesty had no need to be anxious for herself or her children. Even if the monster D'Orléans had bought or persuaded a mob to march out and kill the heirs of France, clearing his own way to the throne, M. De La Fayette would save her and them from the murderous plot. "No doubt!" she said with unnecessary bitterness. "And who will then save us from M. De La Fayette?"

It was midnight when he arrived, wet, woebegone and utterly exhausted. He brought twenty thousand Militia, and, if they could be trusted, there might soon be need of them. Already the harlots of Paris were beginning to talk over-freely to the men of the Flanders Regiment, standing in damp uniforms behind the railings: already the poor workpeople, drenched and hungry, were exciting such pity in the ranks of the Guard as was both creditable and yet terribly dangerous. M. De La Fayette's Militia stiffened discipline and hardened hearts for a time. His men helped to relieve squadrons in dire need of relief. He himself dismounted in the court-yard and stumbled upstairs to kiss the Queen's hand.

Her thoughtless gibe had already flown round the Palace. The courtiers whispered "Cromwell" to each other as he appeared at the door of the Council Chamber. His tired eyes flashed with momentary fire. "No, gentlemen," he said. "Cromwell would have brought his troops at his heels." He kissed the King's and Queen's hands, assuring them that he came to lay down his life for theirs. She was as gracious as her unreasoning dislike of the man would permit. His dislike of her, older and hardly more reasonable, was better disguised,

better repressed. He rose to his feet giddily and made his way out to set watch round the Palace, garrison all possible arenas of attack. When he had finished, he threw himself booted into a bed.

It was early morning now. The King had long been yawning himself stupid. All seemed quiet outside. The crowd had camped round bonfires that sizzled in the still dripping rain.

She gave Axel her hand as he passed out towards her own apartments, close to those where her children slept. "I've just had this sent me," she said lightly, pressing a little note into his hand. "I thought it might interest you." The next moment she was gone, with her women closing behind her.

He opened and read. He tried to follow her, but it was too late. He could get no farther than the antechamber. There he wrapped himself in a borrowed cloak, sat listening to the dripping on the window-ledges, sat watching for the grey glimmering of dawn.

M. De La Fayette had earned his rest, and King Louis could not have kept himself awake though there were half a dozen kingdoms at stake. Axel von Fersen must sit and watch.

The note might be a joke, though a joke in exceedingly bad taste. It might be an attempt to scare the Queen, to excite panic in the guarded Palace. But there was just a chance that it was genuine, an honest warning from someone who had stumbled upon a filthy secret. It told her, with brief precision, that at six o'clock of the morning she was to be murdered in her bed.

THEY BROKE IN BEFORE SIX. SOME FOOL had left a side-gate unlocked, or some traitor handed a key through the railings. In the damp and murky light of October daybreak, Paris, armed, angry and famished, burst in on the sleeping secrets of Versailles.

They smashed and tore and sullied. They shattered mirrors and shivered gilded chairs. They wrenched tapestries from the walls and rolled themselves—unwashed, unrested save for long hours on the wet pavements—upon the perfumed sheets of courtiers' beds. So revelled the mob, astray and bewildered amid the splendours of the past, maddened by long hunger, incitement, and the whip of words. But it was not the mob that mattered, it was not with the mob that the deadliest danger entered.

There was a group of men and women, some poor, some masquerading in their rags, who were far from bewildered and far from astray in that labyrinth of the Palace. They knew their way across the King's Court and up the Marble Staircase. There were leaders to beckon if they faltered: honest witnesses swore next month, on oath before a judicial enquiry, that they had seen one becker, disguised but unmistakable, who could be none other than M. D'Orléans himself. They knew their way to the guard-room of her whose blood they sought, through the two antechambers beyond it, and so to the door of her bedchamber. Those they had murdered in the court-yard, those whom they had stabbed or battered as they came up the stairs, were still writhing below when they burst into the final sanctuary and plunged pike and knife and sabre through the coverlet of her bed.

It was still warm from her body, but she herself had gone: she had run down a passage with her two children. She was in the hall beyond, hammering with desperate fist upon the locked door that barred her way to her husband's room. All honour to those who gave her warning, those who were felled in the

guard-room, or beneath the wreckage of the three shattered antechamber doors. Deshuttes had been killed outside; De Varicourt's head was hacked off, tossed out to join Deshuttes' upon the waving pikes in the courtyard. Miomandre De Saint-Marie, bravest of those who bore the warning, bade the Queen lock the last door between himself and safety; he came off alive, and even saved Du Repaire, though blood gushed in torrents from his head. Fersen, knocked senseless with a club and hurled into a corner, was preserved from the *coup de grâce* by the groom's clothes he had worn through yesterday and the sleepless night of watching.

She was hammering still at the door in the *Œil-de-bœuf*, but they let her through at last, opened her way into the room where the King and his counsellors had taken refuge. The murderers surged on to find it relocked behind her, to find Grenadiers and Guards mustering rapidly in the twilight rooms. M. De La Fayette had been roused from the sleep he had so desperately needed. His Town Bands were ashamed of what Paris was doing, afraid of what others (whom Paris hardly knew) might be planning to do against the Queen and heirs of France.

She, too, in safety for the moment, was sure that she saw M. D'Orléans walking about, bantering the mob that waved those bloody pikes. She caught her son to her, crying that they would come and kill him yet. Madame Elizabeth tried to reassure her, and Louis stopped his fevered pacing up and down to clear his cousin's name. Louis would believe no ill of anyone, unless the proof of it could be thrust close to his short-sighted eyes. When La Fayette arrived, he too kept a tight mouth, having no reason to love M. D'Orléans, but too much else to think of, and no time for recriminations. It was quite useless to ask the other popular idol—an idol now hopelessly fallen—what his opinion might be. For though M. Jacques Necker was in the room, everyone had forgotten his presence. He sat on a stool in the corner, weeping copious tears into his expensive, his beautifully-laundered handkerchief.

Fersen found them together, after feeling his dizzy way along passages and through rooms that the Grenadiers had swept clean of murder for the time. Marie-Antoinette had recovered

her composure: he had never seen her bear herself more royally. Fersen was proud to have loved her and to have won her love. The danger was still upon her, upon all of them, perhaps, except the weeping fool in the corner. The crowd would probably cheer him still outside, with a possible hint of sarcasm, if he made his way to the front door and demanded passage to a coach. He could certainly flit from any side-door he chose out of turbulent Versailles, out of Paris, out of the France that now saw Genius for what it was. The crowd was intent upon other victims, upon one above all.

She had left her son now to Madame Elisabeth: his little voice, complaining that he was hungry, that he had had no breakfast, rang plaintively above the muttering from without. The mob had poured into the Place D'Armes last night: now it filled the King's Court, lapping against the Palace beneath the room where the Queen's friends were gathered: the tall railings, the open gateway, stood up like a broken dyke above the flood that had burst it open. Most of the Guard and many of La Fayette's men stood firm below, defending the doors and the recaptured rooms. Some of the others, the Flanders Regiment especially, had succumbed to oratory, or bribery, or conviction—to love of the new France or to love of certain Frenchwomen who combined politics with the oldest of all professions. Some soldiers had taken this chance to make a dash for the homes from which recruiting sergeants had enticed or magistrates impressed them; but they had left their muskets in the hands of the mob, to be added to those looted yesterday from the *Hôtel de Ville*. And though sabres and pikes could not reach the balcony of the room where King Louis paced distractedly and his child cried for food, it might not be long before the bullets did.

If he were innocent of Rigour, of Firmness even, he seldom lacked Courage. He stepped out into the growing daylight, grasped the parapet of the balcony and stared down, non-plussed, at his good people of Paris. They cheered him at first. They tried to hush each other and give him pause to speak. Perhaps it was fortunate they did not succeed; he was racking his brains in vain for words to fit so unprecedented a *Levée* at Versailles. Then someone began to shout for the Queen and

infected others with his shouting. A musket was raised beneath the balcony, the butt tucked home in a ragged armpit. When she was seen to approach the windows with her hand in the Dauphin's, they yelled "No children!" at her, as though she were making a shield for herself of the son she would have died to save.

She faltered and turned, handing the Dauphin back to Elisabeth. As she faced the open window again, and hesitated on its threshold, Fersen stumbled forward to take the hand the little Dauphin had released. In a moment La Fayette had seized his shoulder and twisted him back out of sight. "Are you mad?" he said.

There would hardly have been a more senseless impulse. Enough men outside were shouting "Harlot!" without giving them such flaming and public confirmation of their taunt. Fersen shuddered back, his hand feeling for the bruise across his brow. He could not even meet the momentary consolation in the Queen's swift and pitying smile, before she took La Fayette's hand and let him lead her over the threshold. It might be the threshold of her death, but she must cross it deprived of the man she loved, linked to the man she so unreasonably hated.

The gun-muzzle followed her movement as she advanced to the railing of the balcony. Her hair was in disarray, her night-gown was barely covered by a thin wrapper of striped yellow silk. It had begun to drizzle again, but daylight was broad now and she was a fair mark for musketry. There was a hush like that of approaching doom over the vast sea of faces, over its foam of glittering steel. The silence spread from wing to wing of the Palace, out from the courtyard, across the square and up the Paris road. Anything might come of it, anything might happen. Her task was only to stand firm, to bear a proud head above the threatening death.

Her pride was successful. Someone swore a great oath and beat down the musket-barrel with his stick. The next moment they were shouting "God Save the Queen!" and the shout echoed from end to end of the masses. La Fayette, courtly as well as brave, lifted her hand to his lips. If their strange enmity ever died for a moment, it was surely in that kiss.

But the King, following them indoors with clumsy footsteps, soon put an end to heroics. "Wet again!" he said. "Those poor people outside. All night too! Why didn't they bring their umbrellas?"

The homely word seemed to remind him of another puzzling factor in the situation: perhaps he remembered an almost wetter day in June, when there had been six hundred umbrellas wandering round Versailles, locked out from their debating-hall, and finally dipping and shutting at the doors of the tennis court, where a certain Oath was taken. "I think we ought to consult the States—the National Assembly," he said, "before we decide what to do."

Outside, the crowd had begun to yell: "Paris! Come back to Paris with us!" The National Assembly, even if it had succeeded in disentangling its Bishops from the embraces of the lewd, was hardly likely to resist the dangerous note that swelled behind the invitation. If the King accepted, it would probably follow him draggle-tailed to Paris, and look for a new hall in which to talk. It refused to cross the few hundred yards to the Palace and confer with the King. The members voted that their dignity would be endangered, keeping official silence on the question of their skins. Even Mirabeau supported the motion; Mirabeau was no coward, but the whisper grew that he was working for Orléans, working to humble the Throne before he opened his paymaster's path towards it. The state of his clothes was almost a refutation of the slander, the fact that he had slept without a bedfellow last night and with little wine to warm his ruined stomach. Orléans paid well, but the lion he was supposed to be hiring roared hungrily at the six hundred who thought him bought.

The King, eager for some sort of decision, offered to come to them. They settled down to a long debate upon the proper formalities for receiving him. Louis was impatient of all formalities, except those he had grown up among at Versailles and been taught to regard as the framework of his universe. They were broken now, and he wanted to make a present of himself, his family and his love for France, to the good people of Paris; they had stood so long in the rain, had slept so little through a night of mutual bewilderment. King Louis ordered

coaches, bade his wife and family array themselves for the journey. He even arranged room for Fersen in one of the many vehicles that must be gathered to transport the Royal dignity, the innumerable hangers-on of Royalty, down the twelve-mile road to Paris. And he did not seem to mind, did not perhaps notice, that the procession was headed by two bloody pikes; on them nodded the heads of his faithful friends and servants whom Paris had murdered in the dawn.

THEY WERE REHEARSING *BRITANNICUS* in the Tuileries of Paris, in a poky little room of that discarded Palace, above the streaming roofs of the Carrousel. *Agrippine* swallowed her mouthful of bread and cheese in order to deliver a *tirade* against unnatural sons, while the Emperor Nero, in shirt-sleeves and a neck-cloth of shaving-soap, was preparing to bawl lustily to the absent supers, who would that night represent the Prætorian Guard. "If this be joy," he muttered craftily when his cue came,

"If this be joy, then bid his heart rejoice . . .

Guards!!! To your post! Obey my mother's voice."

They did queerer things than rehearse Racine in the Tuileries. There were queerer people than the needy companies of actors who told each other (and often rightly) that their art was a great deal superior to that of the *Comédie Française*. There were the Court Officials whose duties kept them in Paris, whose perquisites included rooms in the old Palace; to hold a Court appointment, and not to live at Versailles, was in itself to be a curiosity. There were the artists whose pictures had been judged by other officials to have earned them free lodging at His Majesty's expense, and (after a glance at some of the pictures, the squinting nymphs and bulging Roman temples) the official judgment seemed unfathomably queer. There were the pensioners, and the widows, and the widows of pensioners, the priests who were too old (or perhaps too queer) to be found a parish in the remotest provinces; there was the deaf, self-styled ex-Admiral, who always talked about his Port pocket

when he meant his Starboard; there were the soft-spoken, retired blackmailers, and the man whose grandfather had had a cousin at the same school as one of Louis XV's mistresses.

They lived in astounding discomfort, amid draughts and dirt, amid leaky ceilings, and stairs that gave way beneath one's tread. No one need ever pay for redecorations or repairs in the Tuileries: that was His Majesty's business, and one only had to address a polite *memorandum* to His Majesty, calling His Majesty's attention to the deplorable condition of the Royal ex-creamery or the ex-Third-Stocking-Mending-Room. There was presumably a cupboard for such *memoranda* in some corner of some distant office in Versailles; its shelves were probably in need of repair themselves; they had to bear an annually increasing, though seldom disturbed, burden; the dust gathered upon them almost as swiftly as the Tuileries decayed. And since queer fish are generally quarrelsome, and quarrels are sharpened by the irritation of hingeless doors and damp bedding, Love, Friendship and Charity had long fled from the quarters where Majesty had once walked in splendour.

Their strifes centred largely round their respective shares in the diminishing amenities of their rabbit-warren—on the right to use the only tap that was not grimed up, in some acre and a half of rooms, or the privilege of the *Œil-de-bœuf* (there was an *Œil-de-bœuf* in the Tuileries, in parody of Versailles) to hang its washing in the old Audience Chamber, where Richelieu had once arranged to finance Gustavus Adolphus's march upon Vienna. They were presided over, extremely ineffectively, by the timid *Sieur Mique*, Architect-Inspector to the Tuileries. His life was a daily-more-complicated series of worries and anachronisms. He had seldom had time to read a book or see a play. Of late years, he had given up his daily newspaper, and was merely puzzled when someone started to talk about Liberty or Equality; Fraternity had long ago receded beyond his ken. He knew that things could not go on for ever as they seemed to be going: a crisis was coming, good or bad, and he was unconsciously preparing himself for its advent. But he had never dreamt of what it now proved to be, what the Royal messenger reported after clattering in through the Carrousel.

They must be bundled out, the whole swarm of them. They

must find lodging elsewhere, and then indite their petitions for Government compensation from three-pair-backs in the suburbs. They must remove their incredible accumulations, their baskets and wig-stands and bird-cages. They must make way for their landlord, surrender their lairs to the King. And instead of the eight months that was needed to effect a satisfactory exit, the eight weeks that any reasonable man might demand, they would have little more than eight hours. It was October the sixth, 1789, and good King Louis was coming, or was being dragged into Paris, to displace his pensioners and live henceforward in the bosom of his rowdier and certainly less loyal subjects.

There was no time to be lost. *Agrippine* must cease to moan and *Nero* to declaim his villainy: someone must try and shout an order to quit harbour into the deaf ex-Admiral's ear. All the queer fish must be netted or hooked out before dark, in order to make room for the multitudinous array that would be coming with the King from Versailles. Place must be found for the staff of the King's Goblet, the attendants of the King's Ice-box. Dark would fall early, and it was hopeless to expect a clear *terrain* on which the incoming army could begin its strange manoeuvres for the King's comfort and its own. The *Sieur Mique* could only hope to reduce the number of rearguard actions and mitigate the major casualties to dignity and *amour-propre*.

If the Royal Family had had no meal that day, their ragged escort of mob had hopes of an unaccustomed plenty. Whoever had been holding up the corn supply was now releasing it, sending flour to be baked hastily in a hundred little shops. As the mob lumbered past the barricades and into Paris, they shouted that they were bringing "Mr. Baker, Mrs. Baker and the little Baker's boy!"

It had taken the Royal Family seven hours to be hauled over the twelve miles of road that lay between Versailles and the Tuileries. But though it was now night, though the little Dauphin, still murmuring "I'm hungry," had long ago fallen asleep in the jogging coach, his parents were not yet allowed to enter their new home. Their servants and courtiers could drop out of the procession and begin operations in the half-evacuated

Palace. They themselves must be dragged further, to the windowless *Hôtel de Ville*, to listen to much oratory from their flattering captors.

They had surely been humiliated enough. It was not only the impaled heads that preceded them, the chain-gang of their other friends and servants who walked behind, dreading death on no better pretext than that they had saved a Queen from murder. It was what was said and shouted at them on their way. It was the sight of M. D'Orléans, indubitable now and undisguised, standing on the terrace of his house at Passy; beside him was the mistress whom Marie-Antoinette had refused to receive at Court; and both were blandly accepting the plaudits of the mob.

Fersen followed on foot from the Tuileries to the *Hôtel de Ville*. He pressed in among the audience; Bailly was showing off the Royal Pair upon the platform, while he complimented all concerned on the wonderful day which had brought King Louis into the town where Bailly was Mayor. Louis was curt for once, being desperate for some kind of meal to fill what had been empty since daylight dawned. He merely expressed his joy and confidence at finding himself in his good city of Paris. He seemed faint and sleepy; Fersen, at the back of the hall, could hardly catch his words. But when Bailly turned to repeat to them what Louis had said about his joy in coming to Paris, it became apparent that the Queen was very much awake.

"And 'confidence!'" she said in sharp and ringing tones. "His Majesty said 'confidence'."

It was nine o'clock before Bailly had done, half-past when the torches lighted the King and Queen into their ramshackle Palace. When Louis had at last eaten, when he knew that a longed-for bed awaited him, he gave Marie-Antoinette his hand and led her into the night-nursery which had been improvised for their exhausted children.

"Poor little fellow," said Louis, looking down at his only son. "I hope they gave him a good supper before they put him to bed."

The Queen said nothing. She stood erect and brooding. Then suddenly she bent down and imprinted a swift and silent kiss upon the sleeping head.

"What a day he's had!" said Louis with a sigh. "I must remember to tell him to-morrow that it was evil men who have stirred up the people against us. They don't do things like that, you know, unless someone stirs them up." He made an oddly literal gesture, as of a cook with a soup-ladle. "'Toinette," he said gravely, "little Louis may be—he will be—their king some day. We mustn't let him grow up with a grudge in his heart against them."

She was hardly 'Toinette. She was Queen of France. Slow-witted as he was, he had a vague feeling that she despised him for something that had happened—or not happened—during the hours that lay behind.

"Maybe!" she said suddenly, and then resumed her silence.

He looked at her nervously, vague instincts striving for an expression he was powerless to give them. He could not even formulate the fear that lurked in his mind. He loved her still, in his own way, but had never been able to chide or correct her faults. He was not sure of himself now. He only felt, dimly, that it might be a disaster for France if her Queen conceived for the French people a distaste as blind, though hardly as causeless, as her feeling for M. De La Fayette.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN USELESS as well as dangerous for Fersen to try and follow them into the Tuileries that night. He had services to offer, but not yet. He could not ride back to his Versailles house: it was too near the Palace, and memories of the road were too recent and too painful. He thought of milord Crauford's house, wondering if he could return and buy back his clothes from the groom with a handsome tip. He was loitering undecided along the embankment of the river when he heard the click of a wooden leg behind him. He turned to see Gouverneur Morris.

They had met under a hanging street-lamp, one of those which might soon be let down on its rope to provide a gallows for anyone—perhaps a foreigner—who loved the Queen too well. Morris paused in the circle of smoky light and smiled a friendly smile at Fersen's garments and soiled face. "Supper!" he said. "Some of my clothes: cut in Philadelphia, and not so

fashionable as yours usually are—you've been in Philadelphia, haven't you? Perhaps a game of chess. But supper first."

The word had a welcome sound and Fersen slipped his arm gladly under Mr. Morris's. They walked in silence, turning left and right and then left again, before either spoke a word.

"I don't know what your father would say," observed Mr. Morris unexpectedly, "but I still feel this country likes to have a King. I don't think that he is—that they are in any real danger."

Fersen pursed his lips. "She needs a strong King," he said simply. "She needs a man."

Mr. Morris gave this his consideration, leaning on Fersen's arm as he walked. He looked up at him as they came into the next circle of lamplight. "You are unjust to King Louis," he said.

"Life was unjust to him," answered Fersen, "when it made him a King. Cruelty—Tyranny even—would do less harm, now, than too soft a heart. But maybe it's over-late for either."

He was still brooding as he walked, upon the scenes of daybreak. His head had begun to ache again, and he wished Mr. Morris lived somewhere nearer to the *Hôtel de Ville*. He had almost forgotten his own words when Morris caught them up.

"No, I hope it's not too late," he said. "It certainly wouldn't be if there were a few more like you—and like those poor fellows whose heads came in on the pikes. But it's not just devotion that they need. It's a brain, a big brain, a French brain. . . . What about Mirabeau? They say one can buy him—at a price."

"She won't look at him," answered Fersen promptly, "unless she's changing even more quickly than I imagine. Someone did suggest him, and when Louis hesitated, she said: 'We've not fallen as low as that yet'."

Mr. Morris was glancing up at the houses on his left. "A pity," he said. "There's certainly a brain there. But she may be right."

He stopped, hobbled up two carefully hearthstoned steps, and drew a latch-key from his waistcoat pocket. "About King

Louis," he continued, as he fitted it into his front-door lock, "there's something in what you say. Perhaps it's the whole problem in a nutshell. I'm an American, and I always surprise people when I say I'm a monarchist—so far as this country is concerned: my own's a different matter. But even fanatical monarchists have to admit that it is rather important to get a good monarch—which, as you suggest, is very far from the same thing as a good man." He swung open the door, cheerfully hospitable. "Excuse my entering in front of you," he said. "I want to make sure my rogues don't keep you waiting for your meal."

MARIE-ANTOINETTE WAS INDEED CHANGING more quickly than Fersen imagined. Paris had so little confidence in its King, and Louis was so intent on obliging Paris that it would clearly not be long before the Tuileries was their prison. But before the dungeon was barred for ever, she insisted on a short holiday at St. Cloud, where she could live with her husband and not merely with a harassed King of revolutionary France, where she could see Fersen with less fear of scandal, where she could look around her for some other man, necessarily a Frenchman, who could keep his foothold amid Revolution. There was only one such man, and she had changed sufficiently to welcome him (if not as a person, then as a force, and a tremendous one) to defend her child, her husband's throne, and the tottering fabric of France. Early in May the Count Merci D'Argenteau, who had recommended Loménie de Brienne as minister and acquiesced in Necker, was asked to get into touch with M. de Mirabeau. In the first week of June the King and Queen took their holiday at St. Cloud, Louis glad of a chance to hunt again. Early in July Axel waited outside the neglected side-gate, among the docks and thistles, and saw a coach roll up the Auteuil road, with blinds drawn tight. Out of it stepped the ugly, pock-marked lion who had shouted war upon Necker in the financier's own home, while Madame Necker tidied her *salon* for her Friday visitors. Axel could not help noticing that his clothes were as stained and shabby as ever, his coat-buttons still aggressively enormous. But one could see too, as he picked his way up the overgrown path, that his eyes burnt with a more confident fire. He was no longer a seedy pamphleteer, spending half his time in gaol and the other half earning his imprisonments by fraud or rape. He was an orator, a leader of men, a thinker whose thoughts had power. It was curious that such a force could be bought with money: it was curious that Marie-Antoinette should have to do the

buying, at this fresh morning hour, in the little room at St. Cloud whither Axel was to conduct him. But it was with a great wave of relief that Axel opened the garden-gate and let in the one man who had strength and will to save the monarchy of France.

He escorted him to the door and waited outside the house. He wandered down the neglected garden and watched the little trickle of water that had been a cascade when St. Cloud was better cared for. Indoors three people—one of them a hesitant King who said little, but listened to his wife with increasing admiration—were debating the future of France. But it was barely half an hour before Mirabeau reappeared on the doorstep and strode towards the side-gate of the garden.

He said nothing to Fersen until they had reached and passed it. Then he paused, saw that his coach was still waiting for him, and looked straight into his escort's eyes. "Count Fersen," he said, "I owe you an apology. I used to think you were either a fool who couldn't choose his women or a rogue who chose them for what he could get out of it. I was wrong."

Fersen felt a slight distaste at the man's tone. He realised that Marie-Antoinette would have to make considerable sacrifices of private feelings in order to retain her purchase of this public saviour. But there was no object in resenting what a disreputable lifetime had made incurable. "And you know better now?" he asked politely.

"I know two things," said Mirabeau. "I know that for the first time for months I'm going to have a good dinner and pay for it myself. And I know that I was wrong in saying that the King had no *Men* on his side. He's got one at least. He's got the Queen. Good morning to you, Count Fersen."

MIRABEAU HAD TO WALK WARILY that autumn. He must still denounce tyrants in the Assembly. He must still leave Paris guessing where his sudden access of cash had come from—from D'Orléans, from abroad, perhaps from that Berlin where he had once been a dubious visitor. He must sit up at night, behind locked doors, and write endless memorials, addressed to King Louis, but designed for the Queen's eye; he

must try and wrench them free from the impalpable lumber of feudal centuries and the windy Humanitarianism of to-day: he was determined to turn the monarchy into a weapon of furbished steel, fit for the coming battle. They thought he exaggerated the inevitability of battle, the need for wholesale challenge. Louis especially jibbed at the suggestion that forces now at work were bound to produce Civil War and that it was a King's business to precipitate it at the moment most favourable to Kingship. Mirabeau knew those forces better, and from every angle: he had experience of their seamier side, and he felt within him the grand idealism of Revolution, the burning resolve for a new and better world. It would be new, but not better, if Revolution caught Monarchy napping and destroyed it: all France, all civilisation might come crashing in the process, unless some unchartered monarch, some Cæsar from the ranks, arose to rebuild Authority round the figure of the Single Man. To do Mirabeau justice, he had no ambition for Cæsar-ship. He knew the world and Human Nature. He knew that once a man from the ranks has climbed to kingship, he can allow no Liberty, lest others hanker to follow and displace him. He knew the power of Custom, the Sanction of History, the divinity that can hedge Royal blood more securely than Prætorians, or Regiments of Flanders. They would need their Regiments now; things had been let slip too long, and Custom allowed to decay into contemptible Routine. But the fight could at least be limited, directed to the only wise end. Dauphin must succeed King and himself beget Dauphin, stultifying the envy and ambitions of the possible Cæsars or turning them to humbler usefulness as servants of the Crown. A new and greater France was arising: her energies could be best harnessed, least dissipated, under her ancient line of Kings: Louis XVII must one day sit where Louis XVI now sat. He must wield the sword that had united the French, expelled the Saracens, assimilated Norsemen, and defied (through a Hundred Years of Agony) the arrows of the English; he must wear the Crown that had preserved the country from the disruption of religious strife and made France the arbiter of Europe.

One could not say such things in the Assembly: it was not

interested in History. The Assembly had followed the King from Versailles and settled down in what had been a Riding-school a few hundred yards from the Tuileries. But its change of abode had not meant any change of atmosphere in the debates. One must still pay interminable homage to the Abstractions, still look with suspicion on those who quoted Facts inimical to reigning Theory. And if the tedium of making actual laws (and learning of their sometimes unexpected results) tended to cramp the members' oratory, they could always decamp from their converted Riding-school to the converted monastery of the Jacobins near by. They had established a club there with no aim except the generating of more and more abstract Talk.

It needed patience and ingenuity to preserve monarchical convictions among such circumstances and never let one's fellow-talkers suspect that they had a turncoat among them who was trying to persuade Monarchy to plan drastic war upon its enemies. Mirabeau's conviction was deep and strong, his patience and ingenuity were tireless. But all the while he was helping those enemies to destroy what he regarded as a rubbish-heap of lies and sloth, what the King and Queen both thought to be, with all its ridiculous or scandalous imperfections, the ultimate shrine of Truth. Mirabeau was hounding on the Assembly, not to reform a Church that stood in desperate need of Reform, but to reduce it to such public slavery as would destroy for ever its power upon the secret hearts of men.

The Bishops, the Rohans and Briennes and Talleyrands might applaud the attack, while they wondered how to save their own incomes. The humbler priests, despised and underpaid, prayed that the King's known piety would strengthen him to resist it, to use his hotly-contested Veto against the threat of the Church's Servitude. They did not dream that Mirabeau, cracking the slave-whip in the Assembly, was a hireling of their good Shepherd Louis. They prayed openly for God's mercy on the debauched Anti-Christ. They wondered in secret when God would strike him dead.

Paris was in Revolution, and no one had time to bother about the prayers or the secret wishes of a discredited clergy.

But as autumn became winter, and winter promised spring, Mirabeau was finding enough difficulty, without their tacit condemnation, in maintaining his precarious position between the two stools of Court and Assembly. His health was bad: forty years of alternate gaol and brothel were beginning to tell upon his body, though his brain was as unclouded and as brilliantly powerful as ever. But the courtiers were trying to undermine his influence with the King, with the Queen even, for ever drawing their attention to the streaks of clay that seamed the iron feet of the colossus. Many of them, failing in their purpose, or foreseeing the civil war he would gladly have precipitated, were trickling out of Paris and across the frontiers, giving a lead to other *émigrés* from town or manor-house. And from near those same frontiers came other news, threatening to change the whole disposition of forces if civil war should come.

Fersen had his fill of it, by post from Valenciennes. His Major, and such officers as took routine duty in that uninteresting town, submitted Reports, as long as their imaginable faces, on the state of discipline among the Royal Swedes. He racked his brain to suggest ways in which they might reinforce it, knowing only too well that Valenciennes was only showing outward symptoms of a disease whose seat was Paris. He said nothing at the Tuileries; reports from other regiments must be reaching the Queen daily, and there was no need to add to the burden of anxiety. He read his letters in private and burnt them as soon as he had mastered and answered their contents. But precautions were bound to slacken when the thing became common gossip and Paris talked glibly and triumphantly about the crumbling of the only breastwork between her and the armies of her enemies. One night in March, he even took a packet out with him to read in a café. He was to sup with Erik de Staël: Germaine was away, visiting her father in Switzerland, whither Mirabeau's eloquence had at length driven him. But just as he was leaving his house, dressed for supper, the letters from Valenciennes were thrust into his hand. He decided to walk to the *Rising Sun* in the *Rue de la Sourdière*, read them over an *apéritif* and keep Erik waiting, if necessary.

The place was near the Riding-school, and one could often see the deputies drinking there. He had hardly broken the seal of his letter when Mirabeau butted into the café like a snorting bull, came to rest in the chair opposite him and called for a double glass of brandy. He apologised for his panting, said he was either growing damned old or getting damned ill, and pulled some tattered sheets of print out of his capacious side-pocket.

"Forget manners," he said with a slightly domineering gesture. "We'll read at each other."

The reading of the first paper made him snort again. He drank his brandy in great gulps and called for a second glass.

"Money to pay for it now," he said to Fersen with a knowing smile. "It's my medicine. The doctors tell me I'm suffering from an inflammation of the what-d'you-call-it—the thing inside here." He slapped his broad chest. "I always believe in adding fuel to a fire."

He laughed gustily, but his eyes were sad. The wide-arched brows—as high, though not as delicate as Fersen's—the heavy pock-marked cheeks and brutal nose, could never quite destroy the pathos of his eyes. He tried to take up the paper again, but threw it down in disgust. "And to think," he said savagely, "that I'm losing ground in the Assembly for the benefit of creatures like that!"

Fersen glanced at the paper and saw that it was German, printed in Coblenz. The front page was filled with the trivial doings of such Marquises and Vicomtes as had been following M. D'Artois over the frontier through nineteen months of aristocratic cowardice.

"The *Émigrés*?" he said. "I don't know why you should trouble your head about those rats."

"I don't," answered Mirabeau. "I don't trouble about anything except principles. And when I say 'principles', I mean principles, not windy nonsense like that fellow Robespierre talks. He's never tired of saying 'Liberty, liberty,' but when I tell him that every man—every rat, if you like it—should have liberty to cross any frontier he chooses, then I'm a traitor and a counter-Revolutionary. It makes me sick! You know and I know, M. Fersen, that France is well rid of these folk."

He put a grimy thumb on the headlines of Gothic type. "But I repeat, it's the principle that matters. They've been trying to put me on a committee to make passports obligatory and refuse 'em to anyone who doesn't happen to agree with M. Maximilien de Robespierre's magnificent ideas about the future of Mankind. Me!—that got myself into trouble in Berlin for telling old Fritz's successor he'd be a tyrant if he closed the Prussian frontiers to anyone, or tried to pick and choose his own subjects. Fritz knew better. He let them choose whether they liked living under his government or not! And if they didn't, he said 'Good-bye and good riddance to you!' The new man's a fool as well as a tyrant. Not that one minds so much in Berlin: they don't talk about Liberty there, except occasionally, to throw dust in a foreigner's eyes. Prussia's other name is Despotism, and Prussia's proud of it! But there's no reason why Frenchmen should ape their ideas and pass them on to the rest of Europe. A French passport is a letter from King Louis to the other Kings and their officials, asking them to treat his subjects abroad with respect. I won't have 'em turned into hobbling-irons for keeping unwilling Frenchmen at home! They can do that over my dead body. . . . Will you have another drink, M. de Fersen? At my expense this time."

"I will," said Fersen, signalling to the waiter. "I'm due for supper, but I'm sufficiently interested to keep my host, and my appetite waiting. I knew you'd been in Berlin, but I thought it was before old Frederick's death."

"Both before and after," answered Mirabeau. "I was there when he died: and the clock stopped, the same instant, on his mantelpiece at Potsdam. I'm told they've never wound it up since. They've never wound anything up since, to my way of thinking. Fritz was a great man, as great as they make 'em—only he had to make himself, after his father had bullied the soul out of him. And a great man, self-made and without a soul, is about the unpleasantest thing to live with you can have. Fritz was so damned unpleasant that no one minded at Potsdam when his clock stopped ticking. I put it in my book, you know—"They were tired of him to the point of hatred'." He stared at Fersen with a slightly puzzled frown.

It always puzzled Mirabeau that so few people had read, or ever heard of his books.

Fersen met the stare with a polite smile, and shifted his letters to make room for the second drink that the waiter was bringing. They caught Mirabeau's eye. "I wish I had time," he said, "to read and write *billets-doux* these days—instead of these damned newspapers and Reports. And it's nearly time I was at the Jacobins. I'm going there to finish the argument about passports that we started in the Assembly this afternoon."

"You've my good wishes," said Fersen. "I'm always using passports between here and Sweden. But this isn't a *billet-doux*. It's from my regiment."

"Then it's dreary reading, I expect," growled Mirabeau. "I only hope Valenciennes isn't going to stage a mutiny, while the Colonel-in-charge is whispering into the Queen's ear at the Tuileries."

There was hostility in his glance, as though he suspected Fersen of taking part with those who made trouble between himself and Marie-Antoinette. He swallowed his drink and heaved himself out of his chair. "Time to go to the Jacobins," he said. "Why don't you come too? We could come back here and discuss it all afterwards."

The sad eyes sought Fersen's in appeal, the heavy chin defied him to refuse the proffered olive-branch—or refuse an opportunity of hearing the great Mirabeau thunder against lip-service to Liberty.

"I would if I weren't engaged," answered Fersen, "and I might if I weren't hungry. But I tell you what I will do. I'll come back and meet you here afterwards. You shall tell me how it all went, and I'll pay for your brandy—if you think it wise to go on feeding the flame."

DE STAËL'S NEWS FROM SWEDEN PROVED as uninteresting as De Staël himself. It was eight months since Gustav had made peace with Russia—on sufficiently honourable terms—and De Staël wanted to know why the fleet and army were being kept on such a lavish footing, why Gustav

had grown so confoundedly secretive lately. "He can't surely be planning another war," he said, with a sidelong eye on Fersen. "The great principles of the Revolution will soon be spreading all over Europe, and then there'll be no more need of wars."

Fersen kept his mouth shut: he had his own letters from King Gustav and was giving nothing away. It was rather tedious to hear Germaine lecturing through the lips of Erik De Staël. The only compensation was the next best thing to a *billet-doux*—a long letter which Sophie had written him and entrusted to the ambassadorial post for forwarding. He put it in his pocket for later digestion, and tried not to let his mind wander too much while Erik, despairing of extracting back-door information from King Gustav's confidant, chattered about the great success his marriage was proving. No one who thought in terms of finance, and was impervious to cuckoldry, had any reason to complain of being married to Germaine. But Fersen did not find it easy to keep his mind politely attentive to her husband's long-winded self-congratulation, when there were so many other things to think about.

He wondered how Mirabeau was succeeding at the Jacobins. He had been to the club himself as recently as that January, if only for interest. The members debated in the old Library: the monks had merely nailed wooden battens across their shelves, penning in the twenty thousand books, some of them rare and valuable. The members of the club, even if they had wished to do so, could not dilute their irreligion with any tincture of learning from Ancient Christian Fathers. Chrysostom and Thomas Aquinas, long undisturbed on their shelves, now peered through a *grille* of timber at the astonishing disputants who had stolen the name of Jacobin from the listless monks. They talked glibly, eloquently at times, as if they knew all that was worth knowing about the Nature of Man and the Nature of the Universe. But the most attentive ear could catch no sentence that showed more than a flimsy guess at the Nature of Him who had created both.

There was actually a picture of Aquinas in the library, above the President's chair. The chubby Saint sat on an allegorical

fountain, which poured the water of Truth out of a dozen gaping drain-pipes: Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, representatives of every Order, came to fill their cups from the sacred flow. Only a Jesuit stood apart, hesitating or refusing. The picture had been painted in an epoch when religious controversy was more serious than political, and Jacobins were at feud with Jesuits.

Fersen had remembered finding the old painting more interesting than the modern debate when he had visited the library that January. A member, who was also a Deputy with a considerable position in the Assembly, had been declaiming against the wickedness of using sugar, and even coffee, while their prices stood so high. No good Patriot, he said, could allow them to appear on his table until the profiteers (assumed to be aristocrats) forwent their discreditable lucre. Sugar must be twenty or at most twenty-five *sous* the pound again, before true sons of the Revolution could deign to sweeten their outlook with the forbidden luxury. Thus would the poor know that the Jacobins were their friends; Paris and all France would follow the good example: the rumours of it would spread through Europe and beyond, until the news of what the French were doing reached America, 'until the great Washington and his magnanimous companions-in-arms heard the tidings and congratulated themselves on having had such allies'.

"—Excuse me, sir!"

"What's that?" One of Washington's late allies awoke from his reverie to find De Staël's servant standing at his elbow with a silver tray. "I'm sorry," he said. "Yes. I'll take a cup—and three lumps of sugar, please."

HE LEFT ERIK'S HOUSE early and walked back from the *Chaussée D'Antin* to the *Rising Sun* with Sophie's letter in his hand. He chose a table near the door and settled down to read it. Her news was not particularly cheering. She had had her portrait painted and was angry at the result; she had told the artist to paint her in *négligé*, and he had made her look like a gipsy-woman with small-pox. She dreaded, for the ancestors at Blasieholm when she was hung among

them. For the rest, Stockholm was dull. . . . Stockholm was dull. Stockholm society feared another war—perhaps against revolutionary France. King Gustav had been sent to Coventry, ever since the arrests, by all the best people in his capital. Count Fredrik Fersen, released after a few weeks, had gone off in dudgeon to Ljung, and swore he would shut up Blasieholm altogether. He also swore, as usual, that he was ruined, and would soon be unable to keep up the town house at all. Fabian was travelling, using up more family money; had he and Axel met in Paris yet? Adolf had been ill again, all the winter. Had Axel seen Evert Taube at all? Was it true that Evert was at Spa now, and if so, was it to drink the waters or to plot? Sophie hoped that the Finnish campaign had not ruined Evert's health, as well as left him with a limp.

Fersen smiled, knowing and loving his sister. 'Thank *Her*,' she wrote, 'for all her kind messages. I have longed to meet her so often, but Adolf says that the journey would——'

The door swung open and he looked up from his reading. Mirabeau stood on the threshold, panting more painfully than ever, his face white and dripping with sweat.

"What is it?" asked Fersen, jumping up in alarm.

"Nothing," said Mirabeau, leaning heavily on the table. "Could you——? No, it's nothing."

"Did they—did Robespierre win their vote?"

"He wasn't there. Only Lameth and that cur Dupont. I made mincemeat of them. It's not that . . . it's . . . this damned chest of mine. Could you help me to . . ." He swung giddily round the table and crashed into Fersen's chair. He looked up, with a touch of fear as well as melancholy in his eyes. "Home," he said, and then: ". . . Haven't a home. Could you . . . tell somebody to go and get me a cab?"

HE WAS DEAD WITHIN THE MONTH, on the second day of April. Marie-Antoinette wept for a friend of sorts, as well as for a possible saviour of Monarchy. Mirabeau suffered long agony, but showed neither weakness nor fear. He spoke vaguely of the next world. "If this is not God," he said, when his pain began, "it is His shadow." But he would have no

priest to visit him. Perhaps he feared denunciations of God's anger upon the public despoiler of His Church: but, had he confessed all his private sins, the catalogue of them should surely have left little time for such recriminations.

If he left offspring, there was no lawful heir of his body. He had little to bequeath save debts. His real wealth, the amazing treasures of his mind, his eloquence and energy, must be taken with him to a country whose King has little need of orators to buttress His authority. And there was no successor or trustee he could appoint to watch over the ruin of his work, no champion to prop the tottering Monarchy of France.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FLY-BY-NIGHTS (June, 1791)

"YOU HERE, COLONEL FERSEN?"

Axel was greeted on the steps of the hotel at Aachen by a thick-set, soldierly figure with one of those square, determined faces that one associates more with the small squire than the aristocrat.

"Yes and no, M. Le Marquis," he replied, "or should I say—General De Bouillé?" He put his hands in his coat pockets and stared up at the starlit June night.

"As you please," said De Bouillé. "The National Assembly (God curse it) has taken on itself to abolish nobility, and I am trying to accustom my tongue to the new fashions—so long as they last. But I suppose it is unnecessary, here in Germany."

As he spoke, he looked up in irritation at the windows above, from which came the sound of chattering and much rather forced laughter.

"Aachen is only just in Germany," said Fersen lightly. "All the same I was not warned to expect you here. I thought you were stationed at Malmédy."

"I thought you were stationed in Paris—at the Tuileries."

"Then since we are both on—shall we say?—furlough, and both at Aachen, it is pretty clear that we take orders, some of our orders, from the same superior. Have you come to see King Gustav?" He put the question with a little hesitation. He could not help wondering what the steadfast and military Marquis might think of His Changeable Majesty of Sweden.

"You are right," said De Bouillé with slightly pursed lips. "Do you know how long he is to be here in Aachen?"

"He moves to Spa, I believe, in a day or two. But I take it we shall both be at our posts by then. I ride back to Paris to-night."

"I ride back to Malmédy to-morrow." De Bouillé mounted a step or two and then turned back as if waiting for Fersen.

"And you have nothing more to tell me before we go in?" asked Fersen. "Judging by the noise up there, our interview

with His Majesty is likely to be a somewhat public affair. Incidentally I shall not come in with you. I shall take a turn or two in the street. It's a lovely night, and it always attracts attention to enter by pairs. I am sure that there was plenty of scandal-mongering in Noah's Ark."

If he heard, De Bouillé did not permit himself to smile. He seemed to be deliberating something before he turned for the door.

"I have nothing to tell you," he said at last, "beyond what I have put in my letters to Their Majesties which, I take it, they show to you. I certainly have nothing to add until I have seen this King Gustav of yours in person."

He pursed his lips again as he entered the Hotel, and asked for King Gustav's suite. Fersen, left to walk about in the moonlight, was almost sorry that King Gustav had summoned De Bouillé to Aachen. King Gustav had great qualities, but he might well fail to make the best of them in an interview with such downright creatures as De Bouillé.

THEY AVOIDED EACH OTHER at the Reception. They waited until King Gustav had retired to the card-room and then found that he had so manœuvred as to get them at his table. It was easier to do so than to be rid of the other guests, or to prevent M. D'Artois from lounging up and taking the fourth chair.

The King had only arrived in Aachen the day before and they had fastened on him immediately—*émigré* Dukes and Peers, Bishops and Countesses. He had told them, was still telling them, how charmed he was to find that so much of the best society from Versailles had come to honour a poor traveller in a small German town. But meanwhile he eyed them narrowly, cursed his own sensitiveness for pitying their exile, and wondered how many of them deserved rather his contempt or mistrust. They accepted his flattery as if it were their due. They would have endured his contempt as blandly, had politeness allowed him to throw it in their faces. In him they saw their best hope of a swift return to the empty but pleasant existence they had led before King Louis had dis-

regarded their opinions and called an Assembly to Versailles. All the monarchs in Europe had by now begun to scold or threaten it, to talk of employing force against its members if they persisted in their audacities: Gustav alone seemed ready to do something here and now.

They were deploring poor Louis' folly now, over and over; they were loudly praising King Gustav's resolute and experienced hand. Their second motive for courting King Gustav was not mentioned, though it became clear when the refreshments were announced. His entertainment was always lavish, and doubly welcome in Aachen. Some of his guests had left France in state two years back, and were now watching their funds dwindling to nothing: some had escaped recently, by byways, and were lucky if they had brought a few *livres* from the wreckage of their ancestral homes. To Peers and Countesses, Dukes and Bishops, who had eaten nothing but potatoes for a month, King Gustav's buffet was an oasis in a very monotonous desert.

Some, from shame or repletion, had finished eating and departed. Others still sat round the reception-room, talking the hopeless talk that comforts *émigrés* of every clime and century, and hoped that Gustav, fly-by-night as he was, would rest in Aachen a few weeks before darting on to some Netherlands town to which they could not afford the coach fare.

Others, bolder spirits, still sauntered round or behind him as he sat at cards, or occupied a neighbouring table in the hope of picking up some tit-bit of marketable news. King Gustav watched them, smiling as courteously as he could manage, and drumming his fingers impatiently upon the green baize cloth.

Not that he wanted them all to go yet. If they did, he would have to dismiss the three men with whom he sat at cards, his business with two of them still undiscussed. D'Artois did not matter: the sooner D'Artois left the better. But he dared not let it be said in Aachen—and repeated next week in Paris—that the King of Sweden had said good night to his other guests in order to hold a conference with Fersen and De Bouillé.

D'Artois, a D'Artois somewhat sobered by two years of exile, had been winning at the cards: he, for one, did not need

the money, having brought with him from France a portable and well-feathered nest, re-lined now from the pockets of a dazzled German prince. But he wondered how he had come to win so easily, why the minds of the other three men were so obviously not on their game. Why the devil, for that matter, were two of them there at all—De Bouillé taking furlough (or pretending to) when his half-mutinous army needed all his attention; Fersen riding away from the mysterious business that had been rumoured, these last months, to be keeping him so active in Paris? Brother Louis had presumably not developed a long-overdue jealousy, and sent Fersen away from Marie-Antoinette just when she needed a devotion as doglike and less clumsy than his own. M. D'Artois suspected that all three of his companions were hoping that he would rise and go, leaving them free to discuss their real business. And M. D'Artois decided to sit on.

"Your Majesty is not tired of the game?" he asked; Gustav, whose turn it was to deal, had not taken up the pack that lay ready shuffled and cut.

"I would not say that," said the King. "I find that most games grow more interesting as they go further—even when one is losing them. But——"

He grasped the pack in his delicate hand, ran a bright eye round the crowd, and then suddenly threw the cards face upwards on the table. "But to-night I shall play no more games of cards," he said, with a slight emphasis on the last word.

Fersen and De Bouillé looked simultaneously at D'Artois, while making no move to go themselves. Gustav picked up a card—the Queen of Spades—from the table, and started to study it with unaccountable attention.

"Well then, we can talk," said D'Artois, and silence fell upon the party.

His beady little eyes were fixed on Gustav, wondering what the King was thinking as he pretended to inspect the playing-card.

"It's a good design," said Gustav at last, "if a trifle Gothic. I've never discovered why the Kings and Queens of Cardland still go about dressed in the costumes of the Gustav Vasa

period—I beg your pardon, D'Artois, I should have called it the period of your ancestor François Premier. I once thought of designing a new pack with——” He halted suddenly. “No,” he said, “I must remember that there is a Jacobin Revolution in France, and I have other things to think of. Not more important than Art, but unfortunately more pressing.”

De Bouillé made his first contribution to the conversation by snorting loudly.

“Talking of the Jacobins,” said D'Artois, “I had a letter about those damned rascals yesterday. I'm told they've voted in their talking-house for——”

“Ssh! Please!” King Gustav's face, that side of it which was turned to D'Artois, seemed as grave as a judge's, though Axel on his left could have sworn that he was smiling. “If you have had any news about the revolutionary elements in Paris . . .”

“Why, God damn it, we get news every day. All of us do. And surely we're all friends here.” He glanced round at the room and its sauntering or sitting occupants. They smiled back, glad to be looked at; M. D'Artois, now that King Louis, his son and his brother were in peril among Jacobins, was more worth smiling at in Aachen than he had ever been at Versailles.

“Friends?” said Gustav with a curious intonation. “And they get news from the Jacobins every day? It would be interesting to know if any news travels along the same route in an opposite direction.”

D'Artois looked uncomfortable, as though he himself were under suspicion. “The letter I had——” he began, but Gustav interrupted.

“If it is at your lodgings,” he said, “I would be obliged if you would go now and get it. I want to make out Count Fersen's instructions; he rides for Paris to-night.”

“I'll send my lacquey for it,” said D'Artois, tilting back his chair. “Here—you! You by the fireplace! Go and tell my man to come up here!”

“Please, please!” said Gustav again. “If you cannot fetch it yourself, I must at least insist that you speak to your servant in private.” He beckoned to the waiter at whom D'Artois had been shouting. “Conduct M. D'Artois,” he said,

"to the downstairs cabinet. He has some instructions to give to his servant."

The next moment, with D'Artois gone, he had leant across to De Bouillé, pretending to admire a ring on his finger. "Sixteen thousand Swedes," he said in a low voice, "eight thousand Russians. The Tsarina's my friend now, and she has promised. Dieppe. Havre. A converging movement on Paris. England will not play, but that leaves the Channel free for us. Are the numbers sufficient? I don't understand these things—as I learnt in Finland. I want your opinion." He leant back and raised his voice. "A beautiful stone," he said. "Axel, do you remember Adlerbeth buying one like that in Rome—or was it Florence? . . . Why, what is it?"

Fersen had leant across and was gently taking the forgotten Queen of Spades from his hand.

"What is Axel playing at?" asked the King.

Axel smiled back, saying nothing. He was picking cards out of the disordered pack on the table, placing them in some sort of pattern. Gustav looked puzzled and then turned back to De Bouillé. "Twenty-four thousand," he said in a loud voice, enjoying the soldier's astonishment. "I only wanted to know if it's enough, because I can't raise more. I don't understand these things—the price of jewellery, I mean."

De Bouillé's honest face made a new and equally amusing picture as the last words revealed what seemed to him the amazing subtlety of the King's game. But it only took him a moment to compose his features. "Your Majesty is too modest," he said. "Your Majesty understands these things very well. The two towns you mentioned, the converge—I mean the two towns that specialise in making this kind of ring. But twenty-four thousand would not be sufficient, nor even twice or three times that. There may be Revolution and mutiny in France, but—the price of jewels has not fallen to that extent." He looked pleased with himself as he finished, but Axel, looking up from his cards, could also see in his eyes a dawning admiration for the King.

"With all respect to Your Majesty," continued De Bouillé, breathing more easily, "I think it would be better, since you have no more . . . money, to abandon the project in favour

of others that we have discussed by letter." He glanced irritably at the table. "When Colonel Fersen has finished his card-trick," he said, "he may have a more feasible plan to put before Your Majesty."

Fersen played on. In a moment he had King Gustav watching. A lady and gentleman whom he did not know had taken up their station behind De Bouillé, ostensibly to watch the game that still proceeded at the next table. They could overhear everything, though their backs were turned. It might be better, since he had hardly spoken yet, to do with as little talking as possible.

De Bouillé blew his nose impatiently on a silk handkerchief and then glanced once more at what Fersen was inexplicably doing. The glance became a stare. He too began to watch.

The King and Queen of Spades were in the centre of the table, round them were grouped all the Knaves and a crowd of smaller fry. Fersen moved the Knaves hither and thither among these, but never so as to leave the Royal pair unguarded. He permitted himself one word. "Armies," he whispered, and held up the Aces; then he chose the Spade and said more loudly: "This shall be M. De Bouillé's ace," and began to push it across the table.

"By the way, De Bouillé," said King Gustav lightly, "do they still keep you quartered at Malmédy?" He timed it exactly: on the last word, Fersen was placing the Ace of Spades by De Bouillé's elbow.

"This belongs to the Knaves," said Fersen, placing a second ace between De Bouillé and the King and Queen. "And the other two . . ."

"Are mine!" said Gustav, leaning his left arm on the table. "Or one's mine and one belongs to the Queen of Clubs. And I want to put them here, just along the edge where my sleeve is." He was speaking French: after what he had whispered about the Channel, neither of the other two could miss the double meaning of his *Manche*. But they saw a shade of annoyance pass over his face. D'Artois was returning.

"Long Axel is trying to invent a new card-trick," said Gustav, "and you must not come and watch till it's finished."

"Why not?" said D'Artois. "I shall certainly watch! Just

now you were so damned interested about that letter, making me send——”

“And now I’m interested in Axel’s trick,” said Gustav, “and you won’t understand it if you do watch. Go on, Axel—or does De Bouillé do something now? I’ve already told you that this is my idea for a solution.” He began to move the two aces by his sleeve, in a converging movement towards the ring of Knaves. “De Bouillé can play at the same time,” he said, “and the trick’s done.”

“I have already told Your Majesty,” replied De Bouillé, “that those two aces are not enough to beat——”

“Watch,” said Fersen. He piled the King and Queen of Spades on top of each other and began to move them through a gap between the Knaves. He manœuvred them past the lesser cards towards De Bouillé.

“Well, it’s the weirdest card-trick I ever saw,” objected D’Artois with a pout. “If you fellows won’t explain to me what it’s all about, I shall call Merci D’Argenteau over here and make him tell us the news from Brussels.”

“It’s finished,” said Fersen. “I and De Bouillé have won.” He placed the King and Queen of Spades beside De Bouillé, and covered them with their protecting Ace.

“Well, I think it’s a foolish kind of trick,” said D’Artois, half rising from his chair. “Count Merci! King Gustav wants to hear the news from Brussels—and I want to hear the scandal!”

“It may be a foolish trick,” said De Bouillé slowly. “I rather think M. D’Artois is right about that. But it’s just worth trying through, more carefully. It might come off.”

Count Merci was approaching. Gustav rose from his seat. “I’ll leave you two to work it out, then,” he said, “in detail. But I believe you’ve got the wrong suits.” He picked out the Queen of Spades from under her Ace. “If it’s a question of scandal,” he said, “this should have been the Queen of Diamonds.” He laughed at his own cleverness and took the puzzled D’Artois by the arm. “A last glass of wine,” he said, “if there’s anything left on the buffet. And then we must all go to bed. Axel has to be up early in the morning.”

He gave Fersen and De Bouillé a final smile and followed

the prancing D'Artois. "I doubt if Axel needs any instructions at present," he said as he moved away.

They sat on, waiting till the tide of loiterers had trickled past them in King Gustav's wake.

It was De Bouillé who spoke first. "I said it was a foolish trick," he said, "though there are times when only folly can win. The real point is—can we rely on our Aces? The Knaves—oh, damn these *doubles entendres*!—the Jacobins have rotted my regiments through and through. We open all letters now before they're distributed to the man, and you should see the stink that comes out of some. The Diamond Necklace was child's play compared with the lies that are sent daily to His Majesty's loyal soldiers. You've heard what happened at Nancy, and God knows when it may start happening at Malmédy." He looked round the now empty room. "I hope you do not think that I would sit and listen to a foreign King, even your King, talks of sending Swedes and Russians into my country if I thought that there were any Frenchmen left who could be relied on to do their duty."

He sat grinding his stout fingers together, and staring through the open door at the crowd of chatterers that surrounded King Gustav. He turned on Fersen. "I take it," he said, "that you have the same tale to tell of your regiment. You did not mention whether you came through Valenciennes."

"I've not been there for a long time," answered Axel. "When you asked, on the steps, if it was Colonel Fersen, you may remember that I said 'Yes and No.' The Knaves, the Jacobins in the Assembly, have taken my Ace from me. My successor as Colonel of the Royal Regiment is a young man from the provinces who has written a pamphlet to advocate Republicanism."

"I'm sorry, very sorry," said De Bouillé gruffly, rising from the table. "But I am sure you are finding other ways to save His Majesty. And it will not last long."

"I hope not," said Axel, with a sudden turn of impishness. "I shall be ruined if it does—besides ruining my poor father. The coach for these two," he held up the King and Queen of Spades, "the money to get them to Malmédy, the—but I mustn't complain. If my trick fails, it won't much matter

whether we're beggars or not." He smiled up at De Bouillé. "You go ahead of me," he said. "It would be better not to be seen together."

He nodded back to De Bouillé's embarrassed 'good night!' and sat on, pensively disarranging the cards into new chaos. He would have to be riding in an hour or two. He ought to write a letter to Sophie and tell her who had been at Aachen, at the King's reception. He looked through the door at the crowd of well-dressed beggars round the empty buffet, whose titles would please little Sophie. He wondered how soon he might be joining them in exile if the trick should fail. But he had meant what he said to De Bouillé: there was someone, someone even dearer than Sophie, for whom he dreaded the results of failure far more than he dreaded them for himself.

As he rose at last, he saw that D'Artois had detached himself from the fast-dwindling group next door and was standing on the threshold of the card-room.

"Now you needn't scowl at me, Axel," said D'Artois. "I've only come with a message from King Gustav about your silly trick. He says it shouldn't be either Spades or Diamonds." He squinted at Fersen as if still hoping to be let into the secret. "I don't know what he meant," he went on peevishly, "but he said, 'Tell Axel that if his trick succeeds, it will be because it is the Queen of Hearts.'"

II

FERSEN HAD JOINED THE MASQUERADE IN PARIS again. The music was quickening now, the dance grew daily wilder. There was no means of telling which mask concealed a friend and which an enemy. Soon it would be too dangerous to tear one off, lest one should find behind it the grinning jaws of death.

His disguise, this time, was laughable enough. He had hired the clothes of a cab-driver. Dressed for the part, he stood by his cab at the corner of the *Rue D'Échelle*, and cursed the sultriness of the heavy June night.

Anxiety had brought him over-early to his post. The cab would not be needed till half-past ten, and the bells of St. Roche had only just struck nine. An hour and a half with nothing to do except pace the *Rue D'Échelle*, or risk recognition by strolling across to the Square of the *Grand Carrousel*, where the Tuileries entrance was ablaze with lights and alive with people.

He kept to the darker, narrower street. Idly enough, he began to speculate how it had got called *Rue D'Échelle*, 'Ladder Street'. Near here, he had been told, Joan of Arc had fallen, wounded in her attempt to storm the walls of Paris and recapture the city for her King: perhaps they had named the street after the scaling-ladders her armoured squadrons had carried. Paris must have been a small place in those days if its walls stopped here, so near what was now the heart of the widely-sprawling labyrinth, the Great Beast's teeming lair. It had not been much larger when the bells of St. Roche had rung the tocsin for St. Bartholomew's Eve, summoning the Beast to Massacre, in the name of Christ rather than the name of Liberty. It had grown since that night of blood, fostered by the Kings, until they deserted it for Versailles. But in all its mysterious history there could have been no stranger turn than this of a young gentleman from Sweden, dressed up as a cabby and waiting to rescue a King and Queen from the growing threat of its mutiny.

He was becoming morbid with inactivity. He would risk the lighted Square and stroll down to the river.

He had been up early and spent a long and active day. He had checked over everything in the great travelling-coach in his stables—the provisions, cold meat and Burgundy, and water (since the Queen drank no wine) and sweet things for the children: the mirror and brushes: the secret reserve of money. He had had to go to the banker in the *Rue Sentier* for that, before hurrying to the Tuileries to discuss last arrangements with the Queen and look over De Bouillé's cyphered letters again, making sure of times and places. By now the travelling-coach should be outside, waiting for him to bring the Royal travellers in his cab and accompany them on the first short stage to Bondy.

He stopped to gaze across the lighted Square and up at the Palace windows where Marie-Antoinette was spending the last evening of her harassed sojourn. He hoped he had forgotten nothing, no trifle that might give pleasure, on a journey, to one whose lightest whim was his law. Only vaguely and momentarily did it occur to him that he might have indulged his loving care too much, piled too much comfort and luxury into a travelling-coach that ought not to be too conspicuous or too memorable to those that saw it pass.

Men—and women—crossed and recrossed the Square in the candlelight from the windows, the flare of torches round the gates. The Tuileries was still a Palace, even if it were now a prison, even if its sentinels were more gaolers than bodyguard. They were National Guards, clerks and shopkeepers who handled their muskets in a way that made a soldier shudder. La Fayette would be coming soon to inspect them for the night and tell them what fine fellows they were to give up their evenings for the love of Liberty and the Constitution.

Someone was watching him from the railings of the Switzers' Court. He had better keep moving, in spite of his disguise. He strolled down to the corner of the *Rue Des Orties*, passed through the stale-smelling arches of the Arcade, and felt the cool air of the river on his face.

As he crossed the road and planted his elbows on the quay-

side balustrade, Notre-Dame de Paris struck half-past nine from the darkening island up the river.

THEY HAD FINISHED SUPPER in the Palace. They had left the table for the drawing-room, and closed the doors behind them. Even so, they could hardly talk above a whisper.

King Louis, who had not hunted for many months, and seldom left the Palace, was thinking with pleasure of the open road. His sister, Madame Elisabeth, thought of God, and prayed for success on their venture. The Queen's thoughts were on her children, who must soon be handed over to Axel's care, an hour or more before their elders could join them and the flight begin.

M. De Provence, her husband's brother, had had supper with them, and was sitting with them now. It was as useless as ever to try and guess his thoughts. He had not taken flight with his brother D'Artois; he was to go to-night, disguised as an English milord; he was to take a different road from the King's, making, not for De Bouillé's camp but for the frontier and the greater safety of foreign parts. If to-night's venture failed, if misfortune and death were to overtake his brother and his little nephew, then M. De Provence might one day return to Paris, when this mad Revolution had devoured itself, to reign there as Louis XVIII. As he rose to take leave, wishing his host every success, an enemy might have questioned the sincerity of his words.

The Queen had already slipped out of the room. With a glance and a smile for Elisabeth, she was gone to her children's nursery.

She hurried to the Dauphin's bed, and pulled aside the curtains. It almost seemed a shame to wake him, so newly gone to rest. He put up his little hands to shield his tightly-closed eyes against the unexpected light, the intrusion of grown-ups at this unheard-of hour. Marie-Antoinette bent gently over him, kissed him, and began to whisper in his ear. They were going away, she said, they were leaving this silly old Palace, "for a place where there'll be lots of soldiers". He sat up at that, pommelling his eyes with his fist: he asked for his

little top-boots and his toy sabre. He was near an outburst when she told him that it was all a great adventure, but that, for the present, he must dress up as a girl. Momentarily—with all France at stake—the little tragedy of his disappointment seemed to matter. The Queen was near weeping herself as he shut his eyes and let her pull the girl's frock over him—as he opened them again to dart hatred at his sister for saying that he looked charming in it. Then he swallowed, looked bravely in the tall looking-glass, and put out a hand to his mother. "Very well, Mummy," he said, "I suppose that now we're dressed up, we're going to act a play."

There was a glass door in the downstairs corridor, leading out into the deserted Princes' Court. Here she took her stand, the two children at her skirts. Far off, in the main courtyard, she could see the flare of torches, the figures that moved to and fro as if in some formless dance.

She waited in an agony of suspense for Axel to come and take over the children from her. She had no doubts of him, but she dared not think what might happen if she let them go and then was prevented from following with her husband.

Half-past nine struck from the little gilded clock in the ante-room across the passage. She strained her eyes across the courtyard, towards the *Rue D'Échelle*. There was no sign of a cab-driver coming. And then suddenly, from quite close, from the shadow of the riverside wing, he stepped into sight outside the glass door.

In a moment she had opened it, given a last kiss to the children and put their little hands into Axel's strong ones. He led them away, with Madame De Tourzel, their governess, following behind. But the Queen could not let them go so: she came running after and must help them into the cab. Fersen had brought the cab into the Square, and he was in agony at her imprudence: but it was worse than useless to protest, within earshot of passers-by. It was better to shut the doors quickly, leap on to the box and be gone. In a moment or two she would regain the glass door, the silent corridors of the Palace. The cab clattered under the Arcade, across the Quay and over the Royal Bridge.

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King Louis had the hardest rôle, and for once he played it without a *faux pas*. He said good night to his brother Provence, and went yawning bedward as though the day were done. When La Fayette paid his official visit to the Royal *couchée*, the King was polite and plausible. If he strolled rather frequently to the window, to look up at the hot and leaden sky, it was no new thing for King Louis to be interested in the weather.

M. De La Fayette took his departure, and the gentlemen-in-waiting prepared ceremonially for the Royal repose. The Revolution might be threatening to engulf Royalty altogether, but the King's shirt must be lifted from his shoulders by hands of ancient lineage, the King's slippers must be placed at the right angle on the cushion at his bedside. He was only alone for a minute, while Lemoine, who slept in his room, retired next door to undress, before returning to his pallet-bed in the corner of the King's room. The minute was enough. King Louis slipped out through the closed curtains of his great bed, rearranged them behind him, and tiptoed in his night-shirt through a powder-closet into his son's empty nursery. He was dressed and downstairs, donning a bottle-green overcoat, when Lemoine returned to stretch himself on the pallet. A cord lay across the floor from the King's bed to the servant's. Lemoine carefully tied his end of it to his wrist, so that His Majesty could pull the other end and wake him should he want anything in the night. It did not occur to the drowsy valet that the other end lay on a deserted pillow, on a pillow where King Louis hoped never again to rest his stolid head.

THE DAUPHIN WAS ASLEEP AGAIN, one little arm across his more wakeful sister. No jolting could wake him, as Fersen drove up and down the narrow streets, across one bridge and back across another. The cab must keep moving, keep moving, while the Dauphin's parents played their play in the Palace. It was half-past eleven before Fersen dared turn into the *Rue St. Honoré* and bowl along it back to the *Rue D'Échelle*. Even so he was too early. As he came to a halt, La Fayette's coach (its coat-of-arms painted out in the name of Equality) passed close by, bearing him home from

the Palace. The girl inside the cab hastily twitched her skirts over her brother's face, lest the torchlight should betray him. M. De La Fayette drove on, to sleep a peaceful and unsuspecting sleep before his harassing to-morrow.

They waited at the street corner, among a dozen cabs. Fersen, feverish with anxiety, must climb down from his box and look with a professional eye at his horses' fetlocks. He could not escape the ribald greeting of a fellow cab-driver, but managed to answer it—supreme feat for a foreign tongue—in the rough accents of the Paris streets. When the man approached and grew over-friendly, Fersen drew out the cheap snuffbox he had remembered to buy, and offered him a pinch. With love and a Kingdom in the balance, it was a pleasure to play one's part with skill.

The courtyard was emptying of its lights and its loitering crowd. The *couchée* was over, and there was nothing to keep loiterers from their beds or their midnight pleasures. Still there was no sign of the King approaching, no sign of Marie-Antoinette. Fersen walked round his horses once more. He looked up at the sky and across at the gilded gates; he could see no one remotely resembling those whom he awaited. They were late already, and, if he was to fall in with De Bouillé's plans, every half-hour might matter.

Suddenly his eye fell on a grey figure seated on the stone bench of a porch. He walked towards her, sure that it was the King's sister. As he passed, he said in a low voice: "Waiting for you," and walked on. He turned back, passed her again, with a second "Waiting for you," and this time saw her rise. In a moment she was in the cab, assuring the little Princess that everything was going without a hitch, that Father and Mother were on their way. At long last, Fersen saw them coming: he saw the King stumble, bend calmly down to fasten his unbuckled shoe, and then advance again to hand Marie-Antoinette into the waiting cab. He followed her in, not without difficulty. There was little enough comfort for anyone, this stifling night. All the more reason to drive fast to the town-barrier and the roomier coach.

There was dancing at the St. Martin's toll-house: the gate-keeper's niece had been married that day, and, at two in

the morning, he was still celebrating the occasion with his neighbours. He had no time to waste on formalities, and was still thinking of the girl he had been partnering this hour and more as he ran a hurried eye over the travellers' papers. Fersen had begged one from the Russian Embassy: it was made out for 'Madame De Korff', her two daughters and servants. The gatekeeper was not interested in foreigners with queer-looking names. He handed it back, unfastened the toll-gate, and jerked his head to Fersen in signal to drive on. Outside stretched the open road, trees and bushes, the smell of country things. Paris had been nothing but a nightmare, and they were awake at last.

FERSEN HAD A FEW MORE MINUTES OF AGONY when he drew up at the *rendez-vous* and found no coach. But the night was moonless, the road overshadowed by trees. A short walk brought him to where it stood, with lamps turned low. It was the work of a moment to run back, jump on to his cab for the last time and drive it alongside. The family uncurled its cramped limbs and bundled across into the more spacious refuge. The doors were clapped to, Fersen drove his cab into the ditch, and then sprang up beside Moustier on the coach-box. Next minute they were bowling along to Bondy, the first stage along the Châlons road.

It was three when they reached it, and a grey dawn showed. While the horses were changed, Fersen climbed down to ask after the travellers' comfort: he was still hoping that, in spite of provisional arrangements, he might ride on with them to Malmédy. He looked enviously at Moustier on the box. But King Louis was for once firm. "M. Fersen," he said, "you have already risked too much for us. If we were to be taken, I could not save your life. Accept my friendship and . . . God bless you, M. Fersen."

He was right, though he could hardly advance the strongest argument for his rightness. Now that daylight was coming, it would be madness for Count Axel Fersen to be seen driving a lady, her husband and children along the road to Châlons and Malmédy.

He had a few moments while they changed the team. He stood beside the coach, straining his eyes in the grey twilight towards the face that looked down at him from the window. King Louis was there too: King Louis was still expressing clumsy thanks to him for his care and loyalty, suggesting that he should ride to Spa and tell Gustav that they had escaped from Paris. Fersen had neither eyes nor ears for King Louis.

His hand felt towards the Queen's. He clasped it and felt something hard and round in her fingers: it was a ring, a parting gift. He put up a finger, guided the ring into place, and felt it slip over his knuckle. It should stay there, unmoved, till the moment of his death. He clasped her hand, warm and supple now, and stood silently in love. He heard King Louis clear a slightly embarrassed throat: he heard the trace-buckles of the coach snapping into place, as the fresh horses were harnessed in. He did not know why he still clung so desperately to her hand. He would see her again in two days or at most three, in the safety and bustle of De Bouillé's camp. If war were coming he had at least rescued her from the enemy's lines, sent her among friends and loyal soldiers. There was nothing to fear now, nothing to justify the thumping of his heart. He let go her hand and gave the signal to Moustier. The coach's wheels began to turn, the lamps flickered as it jolted forward. Fersen stepped back and raised his hat in mock salutation. "Good-bye, Madame Korff," he cried.

III

M. DE BOUILLÉ TURNED OVER in his uncomfortable bed in the little inn at Stenay, and realised that someone was knocking on the door. He sat up, fumbled for a tinder-box, and then decided there might be no need of a light. His secretary had orders to call him at any hour, when the Detachment Reports arrived. "Come in," said M. De Bouillé, straightening the night-cap on his head.

The secretary entered, papers in one hand, a cheap brass candlestick in the other. "The Reports, sir," he said. "Lieutenant Boudet; Captain D'Andouina: Captain——"

"Anything in them?" interrupted De Bouillé.

"No, sir. All the detachments have reached their position."

"Choiseul? Has he reached Somme-Vesle?"

"No, sir, he writes from Montmirail. But he'll be in Somme-Vesle by noon to-morrow, and Aubriot will meet him there with the hussars. Apparently he's bringing M. Léonard."

"Léonard? Who's Léonard?"

"I think you must have heard of him, sir. The great Paris hairdresser. I presume the Queen must have sent him."

"What the devil does she want to do that for?" M. De Bouillé sat further up in bed and stared at his secretary as though it was his fault that Marie-Antoinette had whims. "First it's the children's governess, that Tourzel woman, who says she's taken an oath to stay by them and mustn't be left behind—and now it's a hairdresser. I wonder they're not bringing the whole kitchen staff in the coach."

"M. Léonard is not in the coach, sir," said the secretary, looking down his long and slightly reddened nose. "It appears that Her Majesty has sent him on ahead with M. Choiseul."

"Well, I suppose that's something," grumbled De Bouillé, slightly mollified, "so long as the great M. Léonard holds his tongue at inns and places. And I'd rather she sent him on than lost time having her hair done before she starts. Nothing matters so much as their keeping to time."

He settled down in bed, drawing the coarse sheets over his shoulders. "Call me again if there's any news," he said. "Otherwise, breakfast at seven, Staff-conference at noon—have some copies made of the message I decoded yesterday. And we ought to be hearing from the King before dinner-time. Good night—or I suppose I should say, good morning."

"Good morning, sir." The candle guttered, the secretary closed the door and left M. De Bouillé to his four short hours of sleep.

M. De Bouillé did not manage to sleep very much. There were no more interruptions, no further news. But sleep does not come too easily to a soldier who may find himself, within a day or two, leading the Royal armies to a Civil War which would split France with two hatreds that long years could not cure.

"I THINK IT'S GOING TO BE A FINE DAY, SIR."

Balthazar Sapel fidgeted beside Fersen outside the huge posthouse at Bondy, and wondered how much longer his master was going to stand gazing down the road. It was ten minutes since the King's travelling-coach had rolled away, five since the last sound of it had been lost to hearing. But Count Fersen still stood motionless in the growing daylight, and Sapel could not help thinking that it was time to move.

"I hope nothing's amiss, sir," he tried again. "I brought the horses as you told me."

"What's that?" said his master, as though waking from a dream. "Oh yes—the horses. No, nothing's amiss, Balthazar. You've done well. Everyone's done well, even if we were a little late."

He turned to look over the horses—the four that had brought the coach along its first stage to Bondy, the fifth that stood ready saddled. He measured the stirrups, let them out by two holes of the strap, and swung himself up into the saddle.

"I shall go on ahead," he said. "You're to take the horses to Valenciennes, to my old regiment. You can sell the black on the way, and keep the money in case I'm not there to pay you your wages next month. Good-bye and good luck. And

if anyone asks you for a passport, you can tell him to go to the devil. You're taking a convoy of three horses to the Royal Regiment of Swedes."

He wheeled his horse round and began to trot up the little side-road that led northwards to Senlis. He would rather have followed the great road eastward, to make sure that nothing was happening to stop the Queen's flight to safety. He would rather, even, have ridden back to Paris, to see how soon the accursed town would discover that it had been tricked—how much too late it might be sending out its messengers in the vain hope of recovering the prey he had helped to snatch from its claws. But to do either might be to endanger, however slightly, the work of these last anxious and laborious months; and only a fool would take risks with success already in his grasp. It must be the Senlis road, then Noyon, St. Quentin and the Belgian frontier. Once beyond it, he could safely turn eastward, pass through Luxembourg, and re-enter France at Malmédy. He would not go by Spa, nor even send a message to King Gustav till he was sure of success. Marie-Antoinette would be waiting at Malmédy, under De Bouillé's care, and Spa was not on the Malmédy road.

It was now four o'clock of a Tuesday morning. By Thursday night, if all went well, he would be with Marie-Antoinette again.

IT WAS BROAD DAYLIGHT, long before six, but the sun was nowhere to be seen. The great travelling-coach lumbered eastward under a sultry, cloud-filled sky.

King Louis was more than ever grateful to Count Fersen when Madame De Tourzel discovered the cold meat and wine stored under the seat. As soon as they were past Meaux (silent and asleep save for a few servants sweeping the doorsteps) they settled down to a most welcome meal. There was no need of plates or forks. It was better fun to eat off the King's handkerchief, spread over Madame De Tourzel's lap, and make the children laugh by addressing her as "Madame Breakfast-Table."

There was nothing to worry about: everything was going

splendidly. It was true that they were an hour or two behind their programme, but they might yet make that up. In any case, an hour or two would not upset M. De Bouillé's plans. All the worst dangers were behind them, and there was no reason why they should not laugh and talk as if they were on holiday.

Breakfast finished, Madame De Tourzel emptied the scraps out of the window, and the Queen settled down to tell the Dauphin fairy-stories about the woods and windmills that flitted past: Madame Elisabeth began a game of her own with his little sister; King Louis delved into the pockets of his discarded overcoat (it was a warm day already) and fished out a bundle of maps.

He had always loved maps. In the old days he had studied maps of America until he knew more about it than half the generals and admirals who had sailed there in his ships. It was better to sit here with maps of France and count the villages along the road—La Ferté, Viels Maisons, Montmirail.

He looked ahead. He had been wise to turn down M. De Bouillé's suggested route, which lay through Rheims: he had been crowned and anointed at Rheims, and too many people there might remember his face. He had never been in Châlons, the only place where a riot would be a really serious matter. And once they got through Châlons unrecognised, a few miles would bring them to the bridge of Somme-Vesle, where Choiseul was waiting with forty of De Bouillé's hussars. From Somme-Vesle onwards there would be small parties of troops every few miles, to swell their escort and bring them safely to the great camp at Malmédy. He wished Malmédy were not so near the frontier: he did not want people to say that he was trying to leave France, just when she most needed her King: he was only going to his loyal army, out of reach of Paris, and the few misguided rascals there who were preventing him from ruling France as she wanted to be ruled. He wished, too, that M. De Bouillé were not sure that there was going to be civil war. After all, Paris and its rascals were more than likely to submit, once he had escaped from their clutches and had an army to back him. In any case, there was no need to worry about that yet.

He looked down at the map and saw that his large forefinger was still planted on Somme-Vesle, where they had planned to arrive by two. He put his other arm round his son and drew him away from his mother to look at the map. "Do you see that place?" he said. "Somme-Vesle. That's where you'll see the soldiers that Mother promised you. We ought to be there by three."

He drew out his heavy watch and saw, with some surprise, that it was already noon. "Well, by four, at latest," he said. "By four o'clock we shall be seeing the soldiers."

COUNT AXEL VON FERSEN, trotting along byways towards the great northern road, had suddenly discovered that he was unaccountably tired.

It might seem foolish to say 'unaccountably', considering his last month or two of energy, the excitements and anxieties of a sleepless night. But he had certainly pictured himself as riding in high fettle along the road to Belgium, proud of his work, proud of the trust the Queen had placed in him—and of his success in discharging that trust.

The trot dropped to a slow jog, the jog became a walk. There was no pride in his heart, only a great emptiness. He could account for that, too. So much activity, so many things to see to—and now nothing but a simple journey: nothing more to do, except to save his own skin from a not very pressing danger.

He was not enjoying his journey, nor the freshness of the morning. He was beginning to worry about all kinds of things that he had hardly thought of before. He was beginning to wonder again about that huge travelling-coach he had made for her greater comfort, about all the apparatus that he had lovingly installed in it. It would have to stop, time and again, if only to change horses at the posthouses. Grooms and ostlers would be peering into the windows, mere passers-by would be sufficiently puzzled to stroll up and ask who was travelling in such state towards the eastern frontier.

He clapped his heels to his horse and set her trotting again. The trees began to flit past more quickly, the grass by the

roadside was green and refreshing to the eye. He must not let himself fret over things that could not now be helped, things that he might be laughing over, by Thursday night, with Marie-Antoinette to join him in his laughter. It was obvious what was wrong with him now—he had had no breakfast. He would get some breakfast in Bourget, and ride on in a very different frame of mind. And Bourget was only a few miles ahead.

He was still in the same mood when he reached it, and smelt the smell of coffee from the post-house kitchen. He was still telling himself not to be an old woman, as he sat down to table with an appetite that would have done credit to King Louis himself. But by the time he had finished, he had reached a rather soberer view.

If he had been jaded before breakfast, he would be still more so before night. He might be dozing on horseback or finding himself tempted to get to bed early and spend another night in France. With Paris furious at her loss, and a dozen informers to report that it was largely due to Count Fersen, he would be a fool indeed if he risked capture by the emissaries that would be spurring out along every road. He remembered October, and that shameful march from Versailles—with the heads of the Queen's servants bobbing before her on bloody pikes. There had not been much killing lately in Paris, but he had no wish to be the first victim of a new outburst of ferocity.

He called for his bill and asked the landlord whether there was any light carriage to be hired. The man scratched his head, and said that he had a post-chaise himself. "And the breakfast will be twenty-five *sous*," he added.

"Can one sleep in your post-chaise?" asked Fersen smiling, as he fished for money in his breeches pocket.

The man smiled wily back. "If you'll pardon the liberty, sir," he said, "I've been watching you ever since you come in; and you looks to me as if you could sleep in my wheelbarrow when it's going over cobbles."

THE TRAVELLING COACH WAS PAST CHÂLONS:
its occupants were a little dazed by their fifteen hours of

travel, by the now monotonous picture that moved past the windows. But at last they were safe: the last great danger was behind.

It was true that they had not made up for any lost time. They had lost more, what with delays in changing horses and two small accidents on the road. They were scheduled to meet Choiseul and his hussars in Somme-Vesle by one o'clock: it was half-past four when they left Châlons by the Porte St. Jacques, and Somme-Vesle was at least an hour ahead.

It was true, too, that they had been recognised, more than once. The postmaster at Chaintrix had brought out his three daughters to receive the King's blessing, and refused to take payment for his relay of horses. All the others who had recognised them—or almost all—had seemed as loyal as he, if not quite as self-sacrificing. One man, a clerk or shopkeeper by his dress, had seemed unduly inquisitive when they stopped in Châlons, but he had done no more than watch. Certainly they had seen no one ride past them on the road, as if to give warning of their approach to the disaffected. No, it was quite clear that there was nothing more to fear. Thanks to God—as Madame Elisabeth put it—the great adventure had succeeded. Thanks, too, to M. Fersen, added the Queen, and was glad to hear everyone agree.

There was a momentary halt. Moustier looked in at the window and said that it was only a harness-buckle that had slipped and that it was a matter of a minute or two: they must not leave the coach. King Louis sighed: haste or no haste, he was always glad of an excuse to get out and stretch his legs. Now that the coach-wheels were silent they heard a horseman trotting up the road behind them.

He came into sight of the window and halted for a moment. With a twinge of annoyance, Marie-Antoinette saw that it was the clerk or shopkeeper who had seemed to spy on them in Châlons. He had unpleasant eyes and a blue chin. He peered into the coach, leaning sideways from his horse. "Your plans are badly laid," he said in a voice of malice. "You'll be stopped yet." Then he clapped his heels to his horse and cantered ahead of them along the eastern road.

No one took much notice of the incident except the little

Dauphin, who began to cry, more from tiredness than fright. There were too many rogues, these troublous days, who found a strange pleasure in annoying or alarming their neighbours—especially their richer and more aristocratic neighbours, who were now easy game for spite. Probably he had thought them a family of *émigrés* bound for the frontier, and wanted to give them a moment's uneasiness before they reached it. By the time the coach was ready to proceed, they had dismissed the whole incident from their minds.

The King picked up his maps again, peering short-sightedly at the country flitting past. Madame Elisabeth was dozing, with her arm round her niece. The Dauphin slept, snuggled against his mother. There was nothing to distract her thoughts.

God—if it was His hand that sped them—had certainly blessed her friendship with Axel, and forgiven all that needed forgiveness. No one else, certainly no Frenchman, could have done what he had done. Respected and trusted by all, he had not merely arranged with De Bouillé the details of their flight, and taken so brave a part in it himself. He had also, with the help of King Gustav, persuaded the rulers of Europe, the leaders of their armies, that the monster in Paris was a common foe to all. The Austrians would already be moving behind the Belgian frontier. Soon there would be Swedes and Russians to show the rascals in Paris that they could not challenge all civilisation for the sake of their own petty schemes and jealousies. It had always seemed intolerable to her that one French town should have the power to endanger the grand necessity of Kingship. They had broken that power by escaping from its narrow range. Here, in these country places, even Frenchmen were devoted to their King. France, with Europe to back her, would soon find a medicine for the poison that had tried to settle round her heart.

She would be Queen again and her Queenship prove a privilege instead of an hourly agony. She would know that her husband was securely King and that the little boy who now snuggled in her arms would never be cheated of his rights to an ancient throne. Axel would be her friend still, always at her side, best loved and most honoured of all her husband's courtiers. A new life was opening before her, and the promise

of it was enough to make her forget her fatigue, the cramp in her limbs, the stale air of the slowly lumbering coach. And even these trifling discomforts had their edge blunted by another thought that she hugged to herself, laughing with the secretiveness of a naughty child. Unknown to her husband, unknown even to Axel, she had made a little arrangement with M. De Choiseul whereby there would be someone to dress her hair properly as soon as she arrived in M. De Bouillé's camp.

She saw Louis crane out of the window for a moment and then settle back, glancing at his map. He looked at her with an almost boyish, a wholly lovable smile.

"We're nearly there," he said. "Somme-Vesle must be just over the next hill."

YOUNG M. DE CHOISEUL HAD BEEN WAITING at Somme-Vesle since eleven o'clock in the morning. He had arrived there from Paris, with M. Léonard to amuse him on the way, after a few hours' sleep and a damnably early breakfast at Montmirail. An hour later, punctually at noon, De Bouillé's German hussars had ridden in from the east, with Lieutenant Boudet at their head. He had ordered dinner for the men, telling them to eat it quickly: the coach they had come to escort back was due by one, and he was hoping that it might be early on its time.

His hopes were sadly disappointed. One o'clock—two—three o'clock passed and there was no sign of a coach on the brow of the hill towards Châlons. M. De Choiseul was impatient already; he began to grow anxious, fingering his watch.

M. Léonard had long ceased to be amusing and become an annoyance, almost a danger. M. Léonard, hairdresser-in-chief to the nobility of Paris and Versailles, was strangely out of place on that bare, dusty high road, against the background of the foursquare posting-house and its whitewashed stable wall. There had been a time when M. Léonard was famous for finding inspiration in anything, a toy boat, a sponge, once even a cabbage, and clapping it on the head of some delighted patron, as the centre-piece of some *chic* and astonishing *coiffure*. Those days were done; the Queen, after indulging the

fashion for a time, had set an example of simpler and more dignified taste. M. Léonard had been quick to aid her reform and keep her friends in his lucrative *clientèle*. If he occasionally eyed the scraggy hens that pecked the dust of Somme-Vesle round his elegant little shoes, it was with distaste—rather than with any ambition to devise a *coiffure à la poule*. If he thought of his profession at all, it was to regret that M. De Choiseul, spiriting him away from Paris last night, had prevented him from keeping his appointment with Madame De Laage at the Dutch Embassy. He had been talking about Madame De Laage all day, in hearing of the soldiers and the postmaster's people. At any moment his vanity and self-importance might set him talking about more dangerous subjects. For even fribbles like M. Léonard have their position in the world, and Choiseul had not been able to get him out of Paris without letting him into part, at least, of the secret. Choiseul looked at his watch again, found that it was nearly four. He wondered how much longer it would be safe to stay.

The danger had been obvious, this hour and more. Travellers came and went, country people passed to and from their fields, and turned in for a drink and a minute's rest. All asked what the soldiers were doing there, why M. De Bouillé was sending cavalry patrols towards Châlons and Paris, instead of towards the frontier where the Austrians were said to be on the move. The postmaster was still telling them, without conviction, the story he had had from Choiseul: a load of treasure, a coachful of money, was expected, to pay M. De Bouillé's troops, and from Somme-Vesle onward the hussars were to be its guard. Rustic wits suggested that Paris never sent money into the country: it was t'other way round, year in, year out. The soldiers themselves were sceptical when pay was mentioned, and said so in their guttural French. They were not popular, for all that, and Lieutenant Boudet had caught some of them listening to a would-be sedition-monger who asked them why they obeyed orders which were dictated to their officers by the aristocrats and reactionaries who misused the King's authority against the nation. That incident, and a few more like it, were blowing up for a pretty quarrel, with no knowing on whose side the bored hussars would be. And if Choiseul had

had one idea more drummed into him than others, it was that he must avoid causing any sort of disturbance along the route that the King must follow.

For the hundredth time he looked up the road and saw no coach. It was possible that the King had been stopped in Châlons: it was more likely that he had been prevented from leaving Paris: it was most likely of all that he had made another postponement—he had been naming days and then postponing them for some time—and that he would be coming to-morrow, or the next day, or perhaps next week. In that case, it was Choiseul's obvious duty to clear his men out immediately, to get them right away, where they would cease to arouse suspicion along a road that the King might yet have to take.

He ordered the soldiers to stand to their horses. He ordered out the cabriolet in which he had come from Paris, and told M. Léonard to get into it and be quick. He would give the coach another half-hour at most, and perhaps not that. Then he would send Léonard on by road, and ride with the hussars across country to warn De Bouillé that something was amiss.

Amid the bustle that followed, more travellers were coming up the road from Châlons. One of them, a blue-chinned fellow in a three-cornered hat, dismounted from his overheated horse and began to talk to the postmaster, jerking his head up the hill. He rode on, after a hasty glass of wine, but the postmaster looked glum. A minute or two later he came up to Boudet and said: "So you're expecting the King?" in the tone of a man who dislikes being lied to. Boudet silenced him for the moment, but Choiseul had had enough. If the King had been recognised in Châlons, one could only endanger his life by riding into an angry city with a handful of hussars. If he had never reached it, the sooner they were led off his road the better.

He got them mounted, scribbled a note for Léonard to take to De Bouillé or his officers, and sent the cabriolet spinning along the highway. Then he rode a few yards in the opposite direction and peered for the last time up the hill.

There was nothing to be seen, and his watch said half-past five. He wheeled round and trotted back. Boudet brought his

hussars to attention and gave them the "Trot!" With Choiseul at their head they clattered a short way along the high road, and then turned out of sight along a branching lane.

A QUARTER OF AN HOUR LATER, the postmaster looked towards Châlons and saw a large coach rise above the brow of the hill. Within ten minutes it had come to rest outside his silent and deserted post-house. Its occupants looked this way and that, and whispered to each other in what appeared to be disappointment and even dismay. They seemed undecided what to do next. In the end they made up their minds to go forward, as though there was nothing else they could do. They certainly ordered fresh horses and postillions, paid off the men who had brought them from Châlons, and seemed contented—or resigned—to travel through the evening, and perhaps the night, without finding what they had sought at Somme-Vesle. As they started off, the leaders strained at the harness, slipped and fell. A second start was no more successful: one of the postillions was thrown, and had to be dragged out from under his horse, leaving a boot behind. It was six o'clock and more before all was in order and the coach could start—this time without mishap—along the road that led through Ste. Menchould to Verdun.

FERSEN HAD SLEPT SOUNDLY in his post-chaise. He had hardly woken at Senlis, and the forest of Compiègne was little more than a vague dream of green trees flashing past drowsy eyes. By two in the afternoon he had been wakeful enough to be hungry again, but lunch at Noyon and a welcome *carafe* of white Burgundy had assured his further slumbers beside the excellent driver he had hired. They were almost in to Le Cateau when the man drew sudden rein, and Fersen was jerked into wakefulness, to find the muzzle of a musket pointing at his stomach.

It took him all his courage to remember that he was in France, that a Revolution was in progress, and that it had armed thousands of petty officials, some of them self-appointed.

(appointed, as they called it, by some such abstraction as the 'People' or the 'Nation') whose bark generally proved more savage than their bite.

The representatives of the Nation were four in number, all armed with muskets or sporting-guns. They were of assorted ages, but with so strong a family likeness that one gathered the Nation had found it most convenient to appoint a father and his three sheepish sons. All the same, the guns were quite likely to be loaded, and there was no knowing when a trigger might get pressed. Fersen was ashamed to find himself so frightened, and far too recently awakened to think what was best to do.

He did not know how near they might be to Valenciennes. If it was close by, he could not risk braving it out, as he had told Balthazar to do, by quoting the title of his late regiment. A servant with three horses was one thing, an officer another: the disaffected men of the Royal Swedes had spread much talk of their officers—and most of it lies—in the neighbouring villages where they took French leave to drink.

He remembered his passport, the not very convincing passport he had got from the Russian Embassy. He had not bothered much about it, so long as Madame De Korff's was in perfect order: he had preferred that unsatisfactory manœuvre to the more obvious one of ordering one from the Swedish Embassy. The little rat De Staël was hand in glove with the Revolutionary leaders and it was better that neither he nor Germaine should know that Count Fersen was to leave Paris hurriedly, on the night of the twentieth of June. He began searching his pockets for the Russian document, and while he did so, the musket waved over his chest and face.

He found it at last and put on his lordliest air as he handed it to the man behind the gun. It was a relief to see the weapon grounded, and leant against the wheel, while patriot brows were knitted over the penmanship of Muscovy. The three sons crowded round, peeping over Papa's shoulders. There was much grunting and growling, much licking of thumbs and clumsy turning over of paper. It became apparent that Papa's scholarship did not allow of much reading, but equally apparent that Papa would not admit to so humiliating a

weakness. At long last he handed back the passport with a slightly defiant air, and motioned the post-chaise to proceed. He had already forgotten his musket. It clattered on the stones as soon as the wheels began to turn.

It appeared that they were near Bohain, a good distance from Valenciennes and a good distance from the frontier. It was half-past seven, and broad daylight still. Fersen decided to drive on through the night himself and let his hired man doze.

They changed places. Fersen reminded himself that he had better take some turn to the right off the familiar high road to Valenciennes. He wanted to strike the frontier well east of his late garrison town. But he would not reach it till past midnight. Meanwhile, if his luck held, he could afford to stop in Le Cateau and have some dinner. And his luck held.

IV

THE POSTMASTER OF STE. MENEHOULD was in the worst of tempers. The whole of the little town was in a state of irritation—what with soldiers constantly riding in without proper notice to the authorities, and then riding out again on unguessable errands; something was in the wind, and Ste. Menehould did not like being kept out of the secret. The Postmaster, an old soldier himself, an ex-trooper of Condé's Regiment, had a more personal and professional grievance. A small party of dragoons, led by a certain Captain D'Andouins, had ridden into Ste. Menehould at noon, and was now talking of staying the night: and D'Andouins, a lanky Gascon with an ironical tongue, had taken them to the *Golden Sun*, fifty yards up-street, instead of quartering them (as laid down in regulations) at the official post-house of the town. Faillette, host of the *Golden Sun*, had accepted them cheerfully—especially when Captain D'Andouins talked about paying on the nail, in cash. The Postmaster stalked up the *Rue de la Porte*: he was an impressive and even handsome man, in his dark, aquiline fashion: he was going to give Faillette and the Captain a piece of his mind.

He found the pair of them sitting by the front window, and unwisely began his attack from his inferior position on the pavement outside. He quoted the regulations at them: he threatened to report the whole matter to the authorities in Paris: but D'Andouins only sneered, and his host smiled an irritating smile. He grew heated. "And the next thing will be," he shouted at his rival, "that you'll get yourself appointed Postmaster, while I keep a third-rate wine-shop opposite!" Then he began to fear that he was making himself ridiculous, and turned home with such dignity as a man can command when his official monopoly has been infringed and his legitimate profits filched from under his nose.

D'Andouins leant out of the window and rather surprisingly called after him. "All right, my friend," he shouted, "I'll come

over and put up at your flea-trap! But I'm damned if I move the men: they're all right where they are!"

The Postmaster hardly grunted. He was out of temper with Life. He did not know that Life, far from reducing him to the keeper of a third-rate wine-shop, was just about to launch him on a career that would carry him across Europe to famous and fantastic adventure. He merely felt as he remembered feeling in his Service days when his trooper's pay was docked or his rations denied him. He strode past his post-house and out of the town to the field where he kept his two cows. And his resentment against the world in general was sadly apparent in the rough way he milked them that evening.

It was near nightfall, past eight o'clock, when he returned with half-filled buckets. Captain D'Andouins was now sitting in the post-house window, looking up the street with a new air of alertness. Someone was clattering into the main square—an outrider in livery. The Postmaster deposited his buckets on his doorstep and walked up to the square to watch. He would not have bothered but for the fact that the livery was that of the Condé family. The Prince of Condé was in Germany: he had been one of the first fugitives of aristocracy to leave the King's side: what was his livery—if it were his, and not a disguise—doing in Ste. Meneshould Square?

Its wearer, as if pretending to know his way about the town, was turning down the *Rue de la Force*—a cul-de-sac from which he would have to ride back with his tail between his legs. The dragoons outside the *Golden Sun* seemed unaccountably busy: they did not look at all as if they were going to stay the night. A sudden trumpet-call summoned them to the inn stables. Drouet—for that was the Postmaster's name—had not forgotten that call: it was the order to saddle horses.

The liveried outrider trotted back into sight, wheeled down for the post-house and dismounted at its door, where D'Andouins had now appeared. Drouet, walking back as quickly as he dared, was too late to hear what passed between them, *sotto voce*. He was only in time to get a sharp order, from the Captain, for a postillion and a fresh team of four horses. A large travelling-coach was expected, and its occupants would be in a hurry. Drouet bawled the order on to his groom

and asked D'Andouins, with a show of professional resentment, whether he was leaving with them instead of spending the night at the post-house. "I am," said the Captain, "and my rascals with me. So there'll be nothing to report to Paris. And bring me some bread and cheese. I can't stop for dinner."

The puzzled Drouet picked up his milk buckets and went inside. He found Guillaume drinking cheap wine in the tap-room—Guillaume who kept the little *Boar's Head* hedge-tavern, along the road to the frontier, and always tried to talk to Drouet as an equal, almost as one Postmaster to another. It was common knowledge that he could only make a living by doing odd jobs for everyone and by the scrap of clerk-work he had managed to beg from government. He had been hanging about the town all the afternoon, soaking up gossip. He had heard that its authorities had been telling Captain D'Andouins either to explain his presence (and that of his dragoons) or else take them elsewhere at once; when the Captain did nothing except sneer, people had naturally begun to fear an aristocratic plot, perhaps an intrigue with the Austrians. There was talk of treasure being sent over the frontier with an escort of hussars; but it was Guillaume's opinion that every good citizen in Ste. Menehould was in danger of having his throat cut. Luckily, somebody had been talking to the dragoons, up at the *Golden Sun*, and they had promised that they would obey no such order; a few of them, treated to a glass or two, had promised to disobey any orders whatsoever. Ex-Dragon Drouet, listening to Guillaume's rustic voice, wondered whether this alone was not enough to explain the Captain's sudden decision to get his men out of Ste. Menehould.

He was still wondering when there was a sound of heavy wheels outside, and the expected coach drew up at the post-house. Someone began to shout for the fresh horses: someone, newly arrived in Ste. Menehould, was in a deuce of a hurry to be out of it again. One of the Somme-Vesle postillions stumbled in and asked if Drouet's men were ready for the next stage. They'd be well paid, he added, as he called for brandy for himself.

Drouet went out to see if his groom was getting the fresh horses in: he was thinking furiously as he did so, trying to

remember a hundred things he had gathered from the newspapers, or from rumour, these last few months. He was trying to put a suspicious two and two together, in order to make a certain and dangerous four: dangerous to the people of France, dangerous to the new world they were creating, upon the stinking ruins of the old.

D'Andouins, hiding a handful of bread and cheese behind his back, was bowing with a most un-Gascon obsequiousness to someone in the coach. Drouet heard him whisper to the driver: "You'll have to hurry. All's lost if you don't make haste," and then turn to bawl towards his troopers, round whom a crowd was already gathering, at the corner of street and square. "Out of the way, there!" he shouted at the civilians. "What the devil do you think you're doing there?"

"We're doing no harm!" someone shouted back. "We can just watch, can't we? A cat may look at—at anything."

Drouet stepped off the doorstep, and looked into the window of the coach. Its occupants did not seem anxious to hide themselves: a woman, presumably the mistress of the party, was smiling at the crowd, the hateful, patronising smile of the unrepentant aristocrat. She did not interest Drouet. His eyes were glued upon her husband, less distinguished-looking, a little nervous, and obviously short-sighted. Two and two were beginning to make four with a vengeance.

He could think rapidly. There was little chance of stopping the coach in Ste. Menchould: its inhabitants, though not given to Royalism or superstition, were, in Drouet's military opinion, a pack of muddlers who could not stop a flock of geese without an hour's notice of their coming. If he raised the cry now, it was ten to one that this D'Andouins fellow might get his dragoons to do their duty—if only for the critical minute or two—and cut a way for the coach through the broken heads of honest patriots. In any case, it was too late now. The ostler had finished buckling the harness, the coachman was lifting his whip. The only hope—and it was a slender one—was to get a message to Clermont or Dombas-en-Argonne, and tell the people there to put up some sort of barricade and prevent this coach rolling onward to Verdun. If it reached Verdun, it would reach the German frontier: France and the Revolution

would be defeated: their chief strength, their irreplaceable hostage, would be in the enemy's hands.

The wheels began to grind, the horses pawed the cobbles and heaved at their collars. Drouet stood rock-like on the curb. Only he shouted to his postillion: "Don't exhaust my horses!" and then stood waiting till the coach had turned the corner of the street. It was hardly out of sight before he had whipped round and thrust his head in at the tap-room window. "Guillaume!" he shouted, "Guillaume, you great lout! Tell them to saddle me two horses. We're going for a ride!"

Captain D'Andouins would have done his best to stop anyone riding eastwards from Ste. Menehould that night. But Captain D'Andouins had his hands full with his own men. He kept wonderfully cool, munching bread and cheese in the open street and giving orders as he munched. But it was clear that the dragoons were refusing, treasure or no treasure, to follow as escort to the coach. Drouet was not the only man who had recognised faces in it: the crowd was shouting at the soldiers to believe nothing they were told, obey no order from their Captain. D'Andouins found himself hustled to the town hall, cross-questioned by the Mayor and Council, by the butcher, baker and candle-stick-maker of Ste. Menehould. Drouet stamped in, booted and spurred already, and chafed at the formalities that the idiots were scribbling on paper for him to carry to other idiots in the towns along the Verdun road. His own evidence had to be taken down—the fact that he had looked into the coach and seen in it a "fattish, short-sighted man with pimples on his cheek". A loyalist would hardly have described his King so, but Drouet was bound to other loyalties. By nine o'clock he was in the saddle of his tall black mare, galloping with Guillaume towards Clermont and Verdun.

They were past Guillaume's little *Boar's Head*, they were not far from Clermont, when they heard the noise of approaching horse-hoofs. They drew rein to listen, fearing more troops ahead. Then they heard one of the oncoming party break into song—a country song, slightly ribald—and Drouet knew his own postillion's voice. His four horses came trotting out of the gloom.

"So they've taken a new relay already?" asked Drouet.

"Yes, sir," said the postillion, who seemed the happier for drink, "they took 'em in Clermont and paid us off. The horses are still as fresh as you could want."

"They must be in a devil of a hurry to make Verdun," said Drouet, and jerked his head at Guillaume, who sat looking foolish on his horse. "Come on!" he said.

They were already under way; the postillion, behind them, had begun on his song again, when they heard him check, turn and call after them. "They're not going to Verdun!" he shouted. "I heard 'em give orders for the Malmédy road!"

The next moment he was singing again, as though not caring whether they had heard or not. His voice faded away, faintly raucous. Drouet did not stop to think. He must think and ride at once. It had not occurred to him that the King would make for anywhere eastward except Germany. It did not so much matter what the King's intentions were. What mattered was that he had taken a sharp turn northward and to the left. Whatever his intentions, there was no less need to pursue him, and a greater hope of overtaking. They had not ridden a mile before Drouet grunted to Guillaume and swerved his mare to the left.

The hoofs no longer crunched dust and gravel, they fell, with muffled beat, on the turf of the green lane that led upward into the forest of Argonne. The two riders could keep up a continuous canter now. In a short while they had reached the crest of the hill. They only needed to crouch low for fear of sweeping boughs. If their luck held, they might do better than overtake the coach. They might intercept it before it finished the next posting-stage. They might intercept it before it reached Varennes.

It was ten o'clock, and there was broken moonlight through the forest canopy above. Ten o'clock of Tuesday the twenty-first of June. De Bouillé was not sleeping in the inn at Stenay that night, nor peering up at the secretary in the candlelight. He was riding backwards and forwards between his detachments, between Stenay and Dun. He was chafing at the unaccountable lack of news, wondering why Choiseul had sent no messenger from Somme-Vesle, wondering what could have hindered and delayed the King. Drouet rode on beneath the

trees, revolving a thousand plans to hinder the King for ever.

Below him, far below him in the valley, the coach rolled heavily along the high road. On its cushioned seat, Marie-Antoinette slept fitfully, dreaming of release from her two years' torment. A hundred miles to the north and west, her lover Fersen was speeding towards the Belgian frontier, confident that he had saved her from the powers of Evil. Their ways had begun to converge now; in a few hours they might meet again. But between them, on the hills of Argonne, the Revolution—whose mean self-seeking and brutality they saw so clearly, whose high purpose and divine energy were beyond their ken—the Revolution Incarnate was thundering through the moonlit forest upon a tall black mare.

Drouet knew his path well, though he had never ridden it after dark. He had only to keep his wits about him and not miss the rightward turn which would bring him down upon the high road. Already he could see the cluster of lights in the valley, the town he might reach as soon as (perhaps sooner than) the coach. There would be narrow streets there, and even narrower bridge, easy to block with a scuttled hay-waggon, a load of forest-poles. There were good patriots in the town. Some of the Town Councillors—that soft-hearted fellow, Sauce, in particular—might want to let the King through. But Drouet, riding up at midnight, could tip the balance against M. Sauce. If there were more of those cursed soldiers waiting, the patriots would jockey them into disobeying orders, or even, if it came to a fight, overwhelm them in a midnight scuffle round the barricade. Given time, the thing was possible, and infinitely necessary. By hook or by crook, the thing must be done.

Drouet shouted to Guillaume above the pounding of their horse-hoofs. They swerved, and galloped down the grass track until it became a stony lane. They trotted sharply along it until it came out upon the highway. The road stretched, empty and silent, to left and right of them. They must be within a few minutes of the coach's passing—whether a few minutes before or after, they could not tell as yet.

They would know soon enough when they reached the centre of the town. It would be dark and silent if no travellers

had come in to ask for fresh horses and knock at fastened doors. But if the coach had just arrived—or even just gone—there would probably be bustle at the post-house, lights and faces at windows.

Houses loomed up on each side of them, then the white glimmer of tombstones in the cemetery. In a moment their horse-hoofs were echoing through streets, their ghosts flitted beside them on the window-panes of darkened shops. Then Drouet caught the glint of water, reined up on the bridge, and wheeled round to trot up to the inn. He had reached Varennes, and all was as dark and silent as the grave.

AXEL FERSEN COULD STILL bless his luck. He had had a hurried but excellent dinner in Le Cateau; and the new horse they gave him there proved an excellent trotter. He could quite forget his anxieties in the pleasure of spinning along towards Bavai and the frontier. If Belgium provided equally good relays, he could count on getting swiftly through her, crossing Luxembourg and seeing Marie-Antoinette again before she went to bed to-morrow in Malmédy camp. He himself could sit up late with De Bouillé, drinking and laughing at their unfulfilled fears.

He felt strangely confident of getting unmolested out of France. France had let so many of her own nobles run away that (unless some sudden news had alarmed her watchmen) they could hardly object to a foreigner leaving her for his distant home in Russia.

His confidence was justified. He reached the frontier-post in the early hours, and its guard had clearly had no alarm, no special instructions. They looked sullenly at his papers and let him pass. A mile further on, he drove up to a picquet of Austrians, ghostly-white in the moonshine, and knew himself within the Emperor's lands.

It was pleasant to be among soldiers who did not slouch or fidget, soldiers who polished their equipment and kept up the ceremonies. But he was surprised to find their officer—and a full captain at that—keeping watch with them at such an hour. He asked if anything were amiss, and the Captain,

putting out a polite hand for his passport, said there were many rumours, but no certain news—except that M. De Provence, the French King's brother, had crossed the frontier that evening.

"And the King himself?" Fersen was starving for the news—or even the rumour—that he had not dared to ask for in France.

The Captain paused, the passport unlooked-at in his hand. "We know nothing of the King," he said, "and nothing of the Queen. But we are very glad to see the Graf Von Fersen among us."

He handed back the still folded paper; Fersen bowed, pleased to be recognised. "I hope you will hear soon," he said, "that their Majesties have escaped from Paris and found refuge among loyal soldiers."

"You may hear more in Mons," said the Austrian gravely, "if you are going that way. I only wish the Queen were taking refuge with us. The Queen is our countrywoman and it seems a pity that King Louis is not sending her to her brother's dominions. One doubts sometimes whether there is any loyalty left in France."

He saluted, calling his men to attention. Fersen drove on, wondering how many new rumours he had started in their short conversation. As he passed through the silent villages, the chill hour and the long flat roads began to depress him again. Then the cocks crowed, the sun gilded field and farmhouse. He drove past a clump of pines, rare in these plains; before them grew a little silver birch. For a moment he thought of home and Sweden—silver birch against the pine-needles—and of a childhood among hills and lakes. Then the homesickness passed and he drove more gaily towards Mons, to gather news of Marie-Antoinette.

It was six when he reached it, and the streets were empty. As they prepared breakfast for him at the post-house, he stood under the porch and watched the tiny congregation disperse from Mass at the Church opposite—a few women hurrying home to work or children, then a Capuchin, closing the doors behind him.

He sauntered across the street, and the monk asked him if he were looking for anyone.

"I'm looking for news," he answered. "Can you give me any?"

"News?" said the Capuchin—a square-set little Fleming with heavy eyebrows—"I know little except that we are expecting new troops here. The Bishop has ordered extra sermons—more work for us!—in the garrison chapel next month."

"Next month?" said Fersen. "They should have been here by now, if they were to do any good."

The dark eyebrows shot up. "I see you come from France," said their owner. "You will have heard the report which reached us this morning—that the French King has escaped from the Jacobins and Freemasons in Paris, and taken refuge in Malmédy."

"He is at Malmédy already?" asked Fersen, trying to conceal his excitement. "The Jacobins have not stopped him on the way?"

"I heard that they tried to stop him, in the Argonne," answered the monk. "King Louis is a good son of the Church and . . ." he paused, looking down at a dog that had come up the street and was sniffing at his sandalled feet.

"And the Church's blessing has brought him success?" suggested Fersen with a smile.

The monk looked up at him as if already suspecting that he was talking to a heretic. "The Church gives her blessing where it is deserved," he said. "But she has never pretended that it is any guarantee of success in worldly enterprises. Still, in this case—well, if what I heard proves true, then the French King has escaped from the Jacobins and has reached Malmédy without mishap."

THEY LIVE LONG IN THE HILLS of the Argonne, certainly longer than the folk in Paris, with their godless luxuries and stinking streets. So said old Madame Sauce, and she had a right to her opinion, after more than eighty years of life: she liked to tell her neighbours that she was born when Louis the Great was reigning, and Kings were Kings indeed.

No, she had never seem him, nor either of his two successors. The present one, by all accounts, was too busy keeping the Paris rascals in their places to visit the Argonne. While the troubles lasted, Madame Sauce would not believe such silly stories as had reached her cottage that morning—that the King himself had driven into Varennes last night and was staying there with his Queen and children. Things would have to be even worse than they were in France before one could believe a tale like that.

It reached her again, with even less credible embroideries. She was told that her grandson, Jean-Baptiste Sauce, who was a grocer in town, had given the King lodging, that he had shown him up into the little back bedroom where old Madame Sauce had more than once spent a night. She remembered that on its mantelpiece stood her wedding present to her grandson, a pair of china vases that had cost her as much as fifty *sous* and were fit for any King. Apart from them, there was nothing that could make Royalty enter such a room. No, she could depend upon it, there was something very wrong: some rogue—perhaps some young aristocrat on the spree—was imposing on her family. Jean-Baptiste had grown rich, as the Argonne understood riches, but he was still a fool: it was time his old grandmother went into town and saved him from being duped any longer.

She fetched her ash-stick from the kitchen corner, put a drumstick of cold chicken in her pocket, and told her daughter-in-law that she was walking into town. "Whatever for?" asked that widowed and already grizzled dame. "To see the King!"

answered Mother Sauce, and cackled with inscrutable laughter.

There were soldiers on the road. There were soldiers on every road, these last few months, though no one could explain to Madame Sauce what kind of a war was expected. She could remember many wars. She could even remember (back in great King Louis' reign, when she had been a little girl in a village further north) how she had heard a noise like distant thunder, and been told that it was the guns fired at a scoundrel of an Englishman called Malbrouk, who had dared to march his soldiers into France. She was not likely to forget the day, only a few years ago, when they told her that her daughter's boy had gone to sea as a King's sailor and been killed in a village or town called America. Madame Sauce had never seen the sea, but she understood, dimly, that wars were necessary: so many wicked foreigners had to be trounced before they would do as the French King told them. As for what went on nowadays—soldiers fighting their own officers, Dukes and Marquises running away to foreign parts instead of staying to keep them in order—there was no hope of understanding that.

She passed a little party of hussars, sitting glumly on their horses in the shadow of the roadside trees. She gave them a hail and a wave of her walking-stick, expecting them to do as soldiers should—shout back something funny that one could chuckle over as one trudged into town. They merely frowned at her, and sat there like dummies in a row. She stumped on, dispirited. She began to gnaw at her drumstick, hoping that food would put heart into her. Life had been sweet, off and on, throughout her eighty years, but she was glad that there was not much more of it to come, with things in the state they were. It was so bad that she could hardly expect to live long enough to see them put right again.

She had started at an hour which townsfolk would reckon early, and it was not half-past six when she reached Varennes. There were a few more hussars in the streets, jaded-looking fellows who seemed afraid of the people. Round the parish Church were some of the sham soldiers, 'National Guards' as they were pleased to call themselves, strutting about with belts and knapsacks over their working clothes. She had no

patience with them: the young lads would be more useful working on the farms, or even courting the girls; the grown men and fathers of families were old enough to know better. Some of them greeted her as she hobbled past on sore feet, but she only snorted and walked on. She was beginning to feel tired. At her age, even a league was no joke. Some idiot had jammed a waggon of second-hand furniture athwart the bridge, and she had some difficulty in scraping past. She was glad when she turned down into the *Rue de la Basse Cour* and saw the grocer's shop.

There was a crowd outside it, some listless and sheepish, some alert and worried. One of them was calling up at her grandson's windows. "Paris!" he shouted. "Back to Paris!" What could be the sense in that? Another was talking about something he called the 'Constitution' and the National Assembly. Mother Sauce had never had any patience with all that talk. If they had caught some impostor trying to cheat her grandson, there was no need of any Constitutions, nor of sending the rogue back to Paris. They could clap him into the town gaol and have done with it.

She elbowed her way into the shop, making the little bell clang on the door. Jean-Baptiste was there, but he was so busy arguing with people that he hardly seemed to notice her. He appeared to be doing his best to keep them back from the staircase. She was not going to let him keep her back. "What's all this about?" she said. "Where's Marie and the children?"

He gaped at her foolishly: she pushed past him and climbed the stairs. On the dark little landing stood two fellows with pitchforks, one of them Jean-Louis, who ought to be already at work at the blacksmith's forge on a June morning. She began to scold him as she knocked his silly weapon aside and opened the bedroom door. She was still telling him that he was an interfering booby as she walked backwards into the room, and then turned to look.

The folk in the room did not look like impostors. There were two children on the bed, a girl and a little boy. They were still asleep, and their parents stood looking at them. The gentleman wore a bottle-green overcoat, as though he had just arrived—or was preparing to depart. He stared at her with

slow, almost stupid eyes. He certainly looked honest, his wife almost queenly, for all her tiredness and the tear-marks on her cheeks. There was something about both of them that made Madame Sauce feel suddenly unsteady on her feet.

She put up her hand to the mantelpiece. She saw the china vases there that had once been her pride. Something told her that they were not good enough for these people, for all they had cost her: that the lady standing there—and even her portly husband—had been born to live among vases of gold and silver, to be guarded from such as her by lordlier weapons than a pitchfork.

A great awe possessed her. If her knees were giving way, if she was bowing down, it was not only with age and exhaustion. She seemed to know that, for all her eighty summers, she was in the presence of something that had been a thousand years old before ever she was born.

She heard Jean-Baptiste on the landing: she heard the crowd arguing and shouting outside. A new wave came over her, of horror and indignation. It was as if some instinct warned her that the lads outside were not there to protect the King: they were his captors, his hangmen. The cry of "Back to Paris!" meant "Back to Prison! Back to the Scaffold!"

She felt a choking in her throat, hot tears behind her eyes. She struggled towards the door. One does not weep before strangers. One does not weep in the presence of a King. As she turned to escape, her eyes fell on the little boy, sleeping exhausted on Jean-Baptiste's spare bed. The Dauphin, they called him: the heir of France, who could now inherit nothing but suffering and death.

At least he would be none the worse for an old woman's blessing. She took a step towards him, across the uncarpeted floor, and tried to raise her hand as she had seen the parish priest do, times without number. But hand and voice both failed her: a whole world was crashing round her head. She fell upon her knees, buried her face in the coverlet, and sobbed and sobbed as if her heart would break.

VI

DE BOUILLÉ WAS SPURRING HARD ALONG THE road from Stenay. Down every lane and track his men came riding. A score of detachments, a small army, was closing in on Verdun.

It was not De Bouillé's fault if they were late. He had been left in ignorance of everything. The King had despatched no message: Choiseul, plunging across country from Somme-Vesle, had not troubled to send in a report: nothing had arrived at Stenay except a tongue-tied idiot of a hairdresser.

M. Léonard, so far as one could make out, had been voluble enough in Varennes before the King arrived. He had boasted and hinted about his own important mission: he had told the soldiers there that the King had been stopped at Châlons, and that it was useless to wait up for him: he had given the Post-master to understand that there would be no need of the fresh relay which De Bouillé had ordered. But as soon as he had come on to Stenay, he had alighted to stand there like a deaf mute, goggling at the hussars and unable to answer a single question that De Bouillé put to him.

De Bouillé, cursing him for a fool, could only wait at Stenay, with his men standing to their horses, and wonder which of the many stories coming in might conceal a grain of truth. It was four in the morning before he got one he could act on: he gave the order to ride hell-for-leather to Varennes. The roads were bad, the time ill-suited to haste. It would be seven and after before they could reach it, and the devil alone knew what might be happening there in the meantime. One could only ride on and hope for the best.

MUCH WAS HAPPENING AT VARENNES in the meantime, and with astonishing rapidity. Men had ridden in from Paris on sweating horses. Drouet, who had organised last night's resistance, was no longer giving the orders. Paris and

the Revolution were in charge, in the person of messengers from the National Assembly.

The crowd was thicker than ever round the door of Sauce's shop. But it parted when the great coach was brought back from the stables, and halted under the grocer's windows. Before seven struck, King Louis had been half persuaded, half jockeyed, into taking his seat in it again; his wife and children were with him, his face was turned towards Paris.

They could only travel at a foot's pace. Half Varennes was jostling round the wheels: scores and hundreds of National Guards from the district formed a procession behind and before the coach: queerly-armed countryfolk were flocking in to join the little army, angry at the news that their King had attempted to fly from France. King Louis repeated, over and over, that he had not thought of doing so, that he had never intended to travel further than Malmédy. It made no difference. Nothing made any difference now. Queen Marie-Antoinette sat wondering, in numb despair, why her husband wasted so much breath in talking. Of what use were words?

It was after eight before they were properly clear of the town. By nine o'clock De Bouillé had ridden in and captured half of it—the half beyond the river. To storm the bridge, barred and garrisoned, might be an hour's work and more, for cavalry tired with a night of riding. Troops were sent upstream, parallel with the Paris road, to seek a ford or crossing. They found none: they reported that in any case rescue was hopeless. The scores and hundreds round the coach were growing into thousands, enough to defy De Bouillé's soldiers upon the narrow road. And among them were men who would have made sure that their King should perish obscurely in the tumult rather than fall into the hands of the Revolution's enemies.

Sick at heart, De Bouillé turned back for Malmédy. He could not rest there. They would soon be coming for him from Paris. He had failed, and the taint of failure can turn discontent among soldiers into open mutiny. He could not rest in France. He rode for the frontier, pistolled his way through the picquets, and galloped into Luxembourg. He passed no Austrian troops on the little Duchy's borders. The Emperor

had been strangely negligent of his promise to help save his sister.

He was in Belgium that night. It was almost chilly. He rode into Arlon just as another horseman entered the town from the road to Mons. He was the first to reach the post-house: he had sent the host off to see if there were a bed ready, and was awaiting his return under the smoking lamp of the narrow entrance-lobby when Fersen came in from the street.

He turned round to see the tall figure framed against the square of moonlight. "You here, Fersen?" he said in a toneless voice, and then the one word: "Captured."

Fersen had already recognised him, and the sight of De Bouillé, here at Arlon, was enough. They had failed. The rumours of success had been false. Devotion and industry, courage and self-sacrifice, had done nothing but redouble the dangers that threatened all that he loved.

"Will you write to King Gustav," he asked, "or shall I?"

Midnight struck on the tinny clock in the passage. Fersen gripped the arm of a battered carved-wood chair and slung himself into the seat. He buried his face in his fingers, and De Bouillé came up to him to lay a firm hand on his shoulder.

"We did our best, M. Fersen," he said. "We have nothing to reproach ourselves with. I am afraid King Louis is hard to serve: they only had to talk at him in Varennes. But we did our best."

Fersen raised his eyes; De Bouillé, looking into them, saw that it was foolish to be talking.

IT WAS MIDNIGHT WHEN THE COACH, after crawling back through Ste. Meneshould and Somme-Vesle, reached the entrance to Châlons. At this very gate, twenty years ago, a girl of fifteen had been acclaimed with speeches and flowers as she came to France to be a Dauphin's bride; there were no flowers for her now, but much hollow and hypocritical oratory to vex her unhearing ears. It was two in the morning before she could see her children asleep and seek her own bed.

They must start betimes to-morrow, through the stifling heat and dust, the insults and the threats. They were hardly a

mile out of Châlons when a hungry face was thrust in through the coach window; the Queen, whether from policy or pity, offered some of her cold meat to her starving subject. "Don't touch it!" cried some devil in the crowd. "It's sure to be poisoned!" Stung to desperation by this culmination of ten years' slander, Marie-Antoinette looked round for some sanctity that might prove her innocence, handed the meat to her little son, and ordered him to eat.

The coach was more tightly packed as they neared Paris: the Assembly had sent three of its members to ride with and humble Royalty. One of them, the Mayor Pétion, saw fit to cross-question his travelling companions as if they were already on their trial: but when he said that the King was known to have employed a foreigner, a Swede, to drive him out of Paris, and asked the Queen who it could be, she silenced him with: "I am not in the habit of asking my cab-drivers for their names."

Another, the young but equally *bourgeois* Barnave, almost lost his bearings in such close contact with Royalty. Being vain and a little fatuous, he imagined that Madame Elisabeth was falling in love with him, wedged tightly knee to knee. Quickly disillusioned, he himself fell in love with the Queen, and remained her loyal servant, through unnumbered dangers and concealments, until Death came to sever the bond.

She could hardly have expected a conquest now, haggard as she was, begrimed by dust, with no M. Léonard to dress her dishevelled hair. She herself was long past feeling, except, desperately, for her girl and little boy. She had stepped into the coach on Monday night, and had hardly left it till it reached Varennes. A few hours at M. Sauce's house and she must return, seldom released upon her way. And it was Saturday before they reached Paris and saw the Tuileries again.

It was near sunset, and the whole town was gathered, a vast, black, silent menace, to watch the captives' return. They tried to murder her guards and coachmen on the doorstep: La Fayette had difficulty in forming a cordon of Guards to save their innocent lives. The crowd cried out as the Queen emerged from the coach, threatening her with the people's vengeance. She saw nothing, heard nothing. She was past all that.

When La Fayette asked her for the keys of her Palace, a momentary flash of energy made her bridle, lose all dignity, and throw them in his face. She clung to her son's hand, and when they separated him from her for a moment, shrieked out in sudden anguish. Then, steadied by his return, she turned to enter the Palace, to seek rest, rest, rest. In the morning she would write a note that would bring Axel some crumb of comfort.

The sun was low and red. It cast a rosy light over the lime-trees, over the Riding-school where the Assembly sat, over the Tuileries which would be now more than ever a prison. It showed the crowd one marvel which should have helped to shame its misdirected hatred. It showed that in one short week a woman's head (though she were barely thirty-five) could turn, not grey but white.

BOOK FOUR
THE DANCE OF DEATH

✱

CHAPTER SEVEN
O MON ROI

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ONE COULD BE PRIVATE AT '*MON BIJOU*' in the Drottningsgata: one could say what one liked in the low-ceilinged room at the back, which special customers hired at a silver daler for the evening. The proprietor of the *Kaffeehus*—'*Café*,' as he preferred to call it—guaranteed that no wife had ever discovered whom her husband had supped with in his back room: he also boasted quietly that Liljensparre, King Gustav's Chief of Police with the thousand eyes, would have opened some of them in surprise at the things that had been said there about King Gustav without his knowledge. One could even do there what the two young officers had done: one could defy King Gustav's opinions by draping tricolour ribbons round the supper-table where they sat waiting for their friends; one could drink 'Skål' to the French Republic, death and damnation to every tyrant in Europe.

They had waited a long time, and young Pontus Liljehorn was already three parts drunk. He was an attractive enough creature, if rather effeminate, with his soft brown eyes and little rosebud mouth: it was common knowledge that King Gustav had taken a fancy to him, given him rapid promotion in the Life Guards, and allowed him rather more money than was good for young Pontus. He sat with elbows planted on the ready-laid supper-table, gazing at Ribbing with vinous intensity and telling him over and over that it was not enough, that others were drawing far more, that King Gustav's apparent generosity was cowardice or weakness, or anything that could justify its recipient in plotting against the King.

"Essen gets more," he was saying, "and what has Essen done? He's not half the man I am, for all the airs he puts on! If you knew as much as I did about Hans Essen——" He slobbered and stopped. A look had come into Ribbing's bored face which suggested anything but boredom. "By the way," blundered Liljehorn, "didn't you and Essen . . . ? Wait a minute, I'll be forgetting my own name next. Damn this

headache! New Year's Eve last night—— But I can generally get rid of it all by drinking again. Headaches after supper or next morning, that's all part of the game. But before one's even started . . . ! I wish to God the others would come. Have a bit of fun, I mean a bit of talk. Politics, isn't it? I can't remember anything to-night."

His elbows began to slip on the edge of the table: he had to plant them further inland, pushing the tricolour ribbons, the clean plate and cutlery out of place. They would not be clean much longer by the look of Liljehorn's brandy-glass, leaning perilously in position to spill. He caught hold of it in time, moved it to a safer place. "Mustn't waste," he muttered; "no money to waste. The King . . . damned niggardly." The rescue of his brandy-glass suggested another sip or two: the sip or two suggested replenishment. "I say," he asked, as the decanter chattered on the glass rim, "isn't it getting a bit hot in here?"

"I was just thinking it was chilly," answered Ribbing, rising to walk to the large iron stove and push some more logs into its ashy mouth. "January the first," he said. "Only half-way through the winter, if that. Why was I born a Swede? If we hadn't work to do here, teaching Gustav not to ride roughshod over everybody, I'm damned if I wouldn't go off and live in France. I liked France. I liked French women better than the Stockholm dollies. I'd like it better still, now that they are getting rid of their King . . . not that Louis is much like Gustav! But it must be almost as irritating to have a fool on the throne as a playactor and a pander."

"Gustav was saying the other day," answered Liljehorn, " . . . mind you, I don't quite know what he was talking about . . . but he was saying that the fairies must have made a mistake about him and Louis. Must have meant to make him King of France, to stop the Revolution—I suppose he'd have known how to make rings round poor Marat and Danton—and Louis King of Sweden, so that he could just have sat on the throne and been respectable, 'instead of a gadfly like me,' he said. Damned lot of rubbish the King talks nowadays. I don't know why anyone listens at Court." He drank again. The little lips were beginning to sag, the eyes grew clouded.

"You'll spoil that complexion of yours," said Ribbing contemptuously, "if you don't cut yourself down on the brandy. And then your friend Gustav won't give you any money at all."

"No friend of mine," murmured Liljehorn, rucking up the table-cloth with his elbows. "I was working it out the other day that he gives . . . Do you know that damned nigger he keeps at Court—the footman—what's his name?"

"Do you mean Badin?"

"Yes, that's it. Do you know I made out that he pays that black fellow more by the month to wait on him at table than he gives me for . . . for . . ."

He petered out, as if unsure which of his wonderful services to the Monarchy he should quote as deserving of reward. When he spoke again it was in a tone of savagery. "And Armfelt!" he said. "What the devil has Mauritz Armfelt done to be given what he gets? I tell you it's more than a man can stand, the way things go on at Court! I've a good mind . . ."

Ribbing was not interested in what Liljehorn might have a good mind to do. He was looking round the white-washed walls, the low-beamed ceiling of *Mon Bijou's* back room. There were French prints on the walls in cheap pine frames. Some depicted the mutual pleasures of overdressed shepherds and shepherdesses who appeared to be ready at any moment to discard some of their superfluous garments and get down to business. Others, hardly in harmony with them, celebrated the capture of the Bastille and the more ceremonial taking of those Oaths to Nation and Liberty, that had made such picturesque (but such quickly-forgotten) milestones on France's road to the Millennium. Ribbing strolled to the little curtained window: on each side of it was a patch of whitewash less discoloured than the rest, a rusty nail sticking out from the wall. He stood studying them, his back to the door. "And I wonder what used to hang there?" he said, half to himself.

"King Gustav and his somewhat neglected consort—taken down in respect for our feelings!"

Ribbing turned in surprise to hear his question answered..

He saw that Baron Bjelke had entered. Bjelke was an uninteresting enough figure, a paunchy, middle-aged Chancery official. He had learnt in the Civil Service to keep his secrets to himself. None of the guests at to-night's supper-party knew quite what grievance he had against Gustav, nor why he had joined their ranks. But he had a foot in the Court, and a steadier one than young Liljehorn's; they were glad of the information and assistance it enabled him to supply.

"Oh, you here, Bjelke?" asked Liljehorn, rolling brown eyes. "Are the rest coming? I'm getting damned hungry."

"Count Johan Engeström is outside, settling things with the proprietor: our host likes to talk French to him. You know where Clas Horn has gone—and you know who's gone with him! They're at Haga. They were going to see about the . . . about . . ." Baron Bjelke closed the door behind him and looked furtively round the supper-room. "They thought we might do the kidnapping up at Haga Palace—there's a very small body-guard there, and half of it might be bought over. They said it would be simpler than making our barricade in the Drottningsgata here, and trying to catch his coach. I doubt if it's feasible, but they've gone to see. Clas Horn would never have dared go alone, but the two of them might find something worth while. They ought to be back by now—unless something's happened." Baron Bjelke strolled to the table and took out his snuff-box. "As for Pechlin," he said, "it's my belief he won't come. I doubt if we'll see much of him the next week or two."

"Why?" asked Liljehorn. "Is the old devil getting lazy?"

"Lazy? Pechlin?" The Baron took his snuff with a gesture. "He'll be about and doing when most of us young fellows—Yes. I said 'young fellows.' I'm not fifty yet—when most of us young fellows are nursing our gout or looking round Stockholm for an undertaker."

"Is he afraid of being arrested?" Ribbing stretched out a hand for Bjelke's snuff-box and took it from him without ceremony.

"He oughtn't to be, and he isn't," answered Bjelke, "after fifty years of being arrested by every kind of Government . . . and then let loose again for lack of evidence! He doesn't

destroy evidence, you know; he just sees to it that there isn't any. But I've a notion that he thinks there might be this time, that one of us may give the whole business away and provide a great deal of evidence that couldn't be destroyed. Pechlin's an old hand at the game. If anyone plays the traitor, he'll manage not to be one of the betrayed. For the moment he's keeping away from us. At least that's how I interpret things."

His gaze was on Liljehorn, and Liljehorn was quick to take fire. "If you think I'm going to give you away," he said, rising unsteadily, "I may as well tell you——"

"Steady, man," interrupted Ribbing. "Sit still or you'll have that brandy over! If the cap fits, you can put it on. Of course the Baron meant nothing of the kind. But he may be right about Pechlin; I'd not be surprised if it was he that gave us away. He would, if he thought it'd pay him. Only it is not likely to pay him; it always pays better to be on the winning side. . . . The lid of this snuff-box is coming off its hinge, Baron. Why don't you have the thing mended?"

"I've been meaning to for some time," said Bjelke, crustily, recovering so much of his property as was not already in Ribbing's nostrils. He sat down at the table and cocked an ear towards the door. "Judging by the bad French in the passage," he said, "I should say that our Count Johan is just finishing his argument with mine villain of a host."

Count Johan Engeström entered in time to hear the last words, but he was in no mood for banter. He still wore the slightly priestly air of the theorist; his cheeks had grown more haggard, his eyes burnt deeper in their sockets.

"Have those two not returned from Haga yet?" he asked, looking at his watch. "Well, I suppose we must keep supper back. But I had a lot of things to discuss."

"No need to keep that back," said Ribbing. "Clas Horn is better left out of most discussions—except discussions on Poetry! And that friend of his never listens to a word anyone else says."

Count Johan deposited a bundle of books and papers on the table, contemptuously ignoring an indistinct "Goo" evening" from young Pontus. "I've the draft of the Constitution here," he said, "and I want to read it to you all, some time to-night.

I've borrowed a few ideas from Sieyès, but most of it is based on good Swedish precedent—four Houses, preponderance of the House of Peers, suffrage by property from the Burghers. One can be *too* democratic these days. Later, we may be able to experiment." He took a pair of spectacles out of his pockets and began to study his own manuscript, laying it down occasionally to consult one of the books.

"You'll get no chance to experiment with anything," said Ribbing, "until Gustav is safely in our hands. I wish those two hadn't gone to Haga. I am sure my idea of a barricade across the Drottningsgata was a sound one. We only need a good fir-pole thrown across at the last minute and another one ready to drop behind the coach as soon as it's brought to a standstill. Gustav, in the Riksdag, is as slippery as an eel, but he won't slip out of our fingers in the streets."

"Clas Horn suggests taking him to his own palace at Hufvudstad," said Bjelke. "I wonder if we can trust young Clas to keep a proper guard on him."

"I'd trust him for nothing," said Ribbing savagely. "It's ten to one he'll get sentimental and poetic about the 'King in Chains' and let him go so that he can write an ode on his escape." He walked back to the stove and began to kick at its hearth-stone base with his toe. "I wish to God," he said, "we'd never let Clas Horn into this business!"

"I was under the impression," said Bjelke suavely, "that Clas Horn and his friend let us into it—or let us in *for* it, if we are going to fail. Am I wrong?" He swung round to face Ribbing, straddling his chair and crossing his arms over its high back.

"It started a great deal longer ago than that," said Ribbing. "I remember a talk we had, Count Johan and I, when we were dining with that old prig Fersen, six years ago. If I remember right——"

"Did I hear someone say 'failure'?" interrupted Count Johan, slowly disengaging his mind from the papers before him. "I agree that we might bungle this abduction business, especially if Clas Horn is allowed to arrange it. But that's a detail. Our main Cause is so just—and so popular—that the moment we take action the whole of Stockholm, the whole of

Sweden, is bound to rise up on our side. That's why it is so important," he said, readjusting his spectacles, "to be ready with our Constitution, our political plan of campaign, so that we can put it into effect directly we have forced him to abdicate the throne. I know he's obstinate, like most weak characters: but he will have to yield to the Will of the Aristocracy, backed by the Will of the whole People."

Pontus Liljehorn's head jerked up. He made a determined effort to appear sober. "Weak?" he said. "Isn't that rather a funny kindword? He's a damned skinflint and I agree he's slippery as a . . . slippery as a whatwasit?"

He gave it up, resting his smooth baby-cheek on his uniform sleeve. "Tell me when the others come," he muttered. "Lil' nap now."

"There's one point," said Bjelke, after a smile, "that no one's discussed yet. You say your Constitution is based on Swedish precedent. Well, Sweden's seen abdications before—Cristina's, for instance—but she's never been entirely without a King or Queen. And the people—forgive me, Count Johan, I know all about the evils of Monarchy—but the people are accustomed to some kind of figure-head, some dummy. Some of our Kings have been pretty remarkable personalities—Gustav Vasa, Gustav Adolf, Carl the Twelfth. They've left their mark on Sweden: they made a dint, maybe a very deplorable dint, in the Swedish mind. One can't conquer half Europe without pleasing and flattering the people in whose name you do it."

"We didn't come here for a History lesson," sneered Ribbing. "What's all this leading to?"

"Only to this." Bjelke lifted his chin from his crossed forearms. "The Vasa blood still has a kind of *cachet* here. God knows Gustav and his brothers have little enough of it, by the time you've traced it through a couple of nieces and a first cousin, but they're the best representatives we can show. Now——"

"Not that Fredrik fellow!" interrupted Ribbing, in a tone of venom. "We don't want a couple of divorces so that Miss Sophie Fersen can be Queen—even if it's only a dummy that's married her!"

"Don't be perverse, Ribbing," said Bjelke quietly. "That

affair's been dead mutton these ten years. And no one suggested Prince Fredrik. I was thinking of his brother Carl; Carl did pretty well as an admiral against the Russians, but at the same time he was said to be helping the officers to down swords and bring Gustav's damned war on land to a finish. He's just the sort of man who might like to be our dummy—prefer it, anyway, to being King Gustav's! I believe we ought to sound him."

Count Johan was listening. He rose from his chair, leaning a hand on his papers.

"There is no room," he said, "for any King in our plans, nor, as I hope you'll agree, in our Constitution. As you say, Duke Carl was thought to favour the opposition among the officers to his brother's illegally declared war. He no doubt acted on Principle. If he is approached now—and I shall perhaps approach him myself—it will be in order to persuade him to renounce his own rights to the throne when his brother abdicates. They are based on nothing but outworn Feudal Custom, and, as you say, the sanguinary exploits of his ancestors—or, rather, the uncles and cousins of his ancestors. I have a great regard for Duke Carl. It should not be too difficult to persuade him."

He glanced round at his friends. Their sudden silence prompted the notion that he had convinced them. But Bjelke had pursed his lips, and Ribbing suddenly began to whistle an old Swedish rhyme.

"My own mother's son was my bitterest foe,
The farm it was his when to War I did go.
When the Sergeant came for me, my brother——"

He broke off short, leaving the tune unfinished. Count Johan had not recognised, or could not fix words to it: he still seemed to think he had carried the others with him.

"If you take my advice," said Ribbing, "you'll either allow Bjelke to do as he suggests or else you'll do nothing at all. Principle and Princes don't always agree."

Bjelke smiled, giving Ribbing to understand that he could act without allowance from others. "In any case," said Count

Johan, masking his failure to convince, "that isn't the point now. My Constitution has no place for figure-heads: just a President—I call him Marshal in the old Swedish fashion—elected from the House of Peers. As an alternative——"

He broke off impatiently and peered towards the door. There was a sound of stumbling feet outside it, of something soft bumping against the panels. Ribbing marched up, swung it open, and pulled Clas Horn into the room.

Horn's elegant clothes were dishevelled and dripping with melted snow. There was a suspicion of tears in his eyes, and his long, sensitive face was white with some unexplained emotion.

"We saw him," he gasped out. "We climbed over the park wall and got under his window. Pontus, give me some drink, for the love of God. He keeps no proper guard, and we got quite close. Thank you, my friend, thank you." Bjelke had poured him out a glass of brandy and he drank greedily.

"Hadn't you better pull yourself together?" said Count Johan with the air of a schoolmaster. "We are here to-night to discuss serious matters—not escapades over park walls."

"Yes, but we were planning to abduct him," said Horn resentfully. "We can't get on to what you call serious matters until he's in our hands and I can get him safely to Hufvudstad. My idea was——"

"We've heard enough of your ideas!" said Ribbing sharply, "and you needn't think we're going to trust you with Gustav at Hufvudstad now! You've only peeped in through his Palace window, and back you come, dithering as if you had met a ghost! Am I right, Bjelke? Am I right, Count Johan?"

Pontus Liljehorn stirred uneasily, raising his head from his hands. "Have th'others come?" he asked. "Can we have supper now?"

"There were candles in the room," said Clas Horn more quietly. "Thousands of candles. I couldn't help thinking of those lines in Thorild's *Hildur*. You remember the ones that begin——"

"We don't," said Ribbing, "and we don't want to. Tell us what happened."

"Nothing happened. He just came into the room, into the

candlelight. He was wearing a green dressing-gown. He stood looking out at the snow a moment. I was afraid he'd see us, the moon was so bright. But he turned away, stretched himself out on a sofa. And it suddenly came over me—I suddenly thought—I just turned and ran. Anckarström had to follow, but he didn't catch up with me till I'd reached the park wall again. Our cab was waiting the other side. We came straight back. This abduction business is all nonsense. You can't kidnap a man like that."

"*You can't,*" snapped Ribbing, and strolled back to the stove.

"Let's have supper," said Pontus Liljehorn petulantly; he seemed a little more sober. "Didn't you say you've brought Anckarström? I've got to be back at Haga to-night. I'm on guard at eleven. They've changed our hours."

"Since when?" asked Ribbing. "Don't tell me this is some extra precaution? Don't tell me Liljensparre has smelt a rat down at his Police House and told Gustav to be more careful."

"I wasn't going to tell you anything," said Pontus, rising, "except that I've got a devil of a headache and that I'm damnably hungry. I'm going to order supper."

Ribbing caught him roughly by the shoulder. "Will there be extra guards," he said, "when the King's coach comes into Stockholm? Will we be able to stop him here in the Drottningsgata?"

"I tell you I don't know!" shouted Pontus. "I know nothing! D'you hear? Nothing!" With a sudden effort, surprising in one of his girlish frame, he wrenched himself free and stumbled towards the door. It opened as he came, and he began bawling to the host to serve supper. Then he slipped, stepped back, and caught hold of the chair which stood by the table's end. He was staring with glassy eyes through the door. It was not the host that was entering.

Beards had grown a little commoner these last few years, and their eccentricity was less striking. But there were plenty of other things to draw the eye to Jakob Anckerström and, once drawn, to hold it. Barely thirty, yet his face was furrowed and strained. An unhappy childhood—and his own more recent way of living—gave him an air of bearing the cares of

the world upon his shoulders. His black hair fell in abundance about his shoulders: it sprouted more stiffly from his unnaturally high forehead, above his dark and suffering eyes. He wore a black hat; a heavy cloak, peppered with snow, shrouded his firmly-braced shoulders. He did not appear to see Pontus, though he bent his head momentarily to the others. He walked to the little window, pushed aside its curtains and stood looking out into the bitter night.

"Very well. Go and order supper," said Ribbing, eager to be rid of Pontus. He looked round at his friends, strangely immobile—Bjelke astraddle the chair, Count Johan bent over his papers, Clas Horn furtively wiping his eyes with an elegant silk handkerchief. "I suppose Captain Anckarström will tell us," he said, "what we were beginning to realise already: that this plan for abducting the King will never be put into action. We need—something else."

Anckarström did not move; he did not even nod; but it was sufficiently clear that he had long contemplated something more extreme than abduction.

"We need—what?" said Bjelke, smiling a little nervously. "Which of us is going to say it first?"

"We need a man of courage," said Ribbing. "I'd do it myself if I thought you'd back me properly. We need someone to put an inch or two of steel into someone—or an ounce or two of lead. Count Johan has a fine Constitution on paper there that he wants to read us. It'll stay on paper so long as King Gustav is still playing the jackanapes on the throne."

There was a long pause. Each man felt a curious relief at the blurting out of a thought that had long dwelt hidden in the dark regions beneath his own mind. Count Johan folded his papers with a curious precision, shut them neatly into one of his books. "And do we now discuss," he said with an effort, "which it is to be—knife or bullet? I wish it could be done without either."

"It's not a question of what we wish," said Clas Horn suddenly. "It's a question of what fate drives us to."

"The Fates alone can mortal lives control:
Not as we would, but as they guide the soul.' "

Ribbing made a gesture of impatience. "I think we can leave the question of knives or bullets to our champion," he said, "when we have decided who it is to be." He looked up the room. Rather to his surprise, Anckarström had raised his two arms and grasped the two rusty nails from which the pictures had been removed. He stood so a moment, almost as if crucified. Then he loosened the nails from the plaster, jingled them together in his hand and put them into a pocket hidden beneath his cloak.

"Whoever is to do it," said Clas Horn, with forced rhetoric, "will be known as our leader, as the saviour of the country from the powers of Hell! We should choose him to-night. We should make him sit here as master of the feast." He drew back the armchair that stood at the head of the table. He glanced at Bjelke, then more hopefully at Ribbing. Pontus was returning; the host followed with a tray of soup-plates. But as the latter reached the table, began to push back the disarranged tricolour, it was Captain Jakob Anckarström who walked slowly to the arm-chair and sat himself down upon its leather seat.

II

"SO YOU HAVE A RIVAL NOW?" COUNT MERCI D'Argenteau was breakfasting in his luxurious house in Brussels and Fersen had paid him an unexpected visit before the meal was half done. Fersen seemed to be under the influence of some unexplained urgency, and was certainly in no mood for banter. "Whom do you mean?" he said.

"This young man Barnave. You sat outside the coach when the Royal Family left Paris, but M. Barnave came home inside, opposite or next to her through a couple of days. He seems to have suffered from the usual effects of proximity. He seems to be considerably in love."

"And writes her long lectures on politics!" answered Axel, sitting astraddle one of M. Merci D'Argenteau's morning-room chairs. "I don't think I need fear his rivalry."

"Even if you have breakfasted already," said the elder man, "I think you really ought to give my rolls a trial. I suppose I am prejudiced, being native in Belgium, and only an employé, or an ex-employé of Austria: but in my opinion, we make even better bread in Brussels than they do in Vienna. And there's plenty of coffee left." He lifted the lid of his silver coffee-pot and snuffed the steam.

Axel shook his head. He looked as if he were longing to be astride a horse rather than a morning-room chair.

"She listens to the lectures," continued Count Merci. "She even writes back . . . and with surprising penetration. She's the most surprising woman altogether; it is simply beyond me how people can go on calling her flippant or headstrong. She never was flippant, and since October she's been as wary as . . . as . . ." He appeared to search for some comparison which would not sound out of tune with his real respect and affection for Marie-Antoinette. He decided to leave it undiscovered. "Dangerous, perhaps," he continued, "if you happen to be on the other side in politics. She can think—since Varennes—or perhaps since Mirabeau. They'll be properly

surprised, one day, to discover that she has a brain, though my friend the Abbé Vermont did his best to spoil it by leaving it completely uneducated. But then I suppose all women are surprising when their children are in danger and their menfolk can't rise to the occasion—or have to live the other side of a frontier where they can only occasionally smuggle in a cyphered letter."

Fersen seemed to resent the implication. "It's not my fault——" he began.

Merci quieted him with a gesture. "Of course not!" he interrupted. "I said 'have to'. It's certainly not your fault that you can't be in Paris. . . . They'd put you in gaol if you went, and probably have your head off for your part in the Varennes business. Meanwhile M. Barnave has access . . . of a sort. He's no fool, you know. His lectures are a trifle dictatorial, and a trifle optimistic, but he knows his Assembly. He may not shine in the debates, but he's a pretty shrewd judge of what the outcome of them is likely to be."

He paused. Fersen seemed uninterested, staring out of the window at the frost-laden trees in Count Merci's garden. He fidgeted with his fingers on the chair-back. Count Merci was momentarily puzzled. "Do I gather," he said, "from your attire and your inattention, that you are contemplating a move from Brussels? I am sure it is dull for you, since Crauford and Mrs. Sullivan removed to Paris, but you can hardly follow them to——"

Fersen took the gibe badly. He rose with an impatient gesture, and then sat down again, undeniably blushing with embarrassment. It had been common talk among the exiles that while Crauford and his mistress were in Brussels he had found certain minor compensations for his enforced separation from Marie-Antoinette.

"The Queen told me," he said stiffly, "that she was only playing with this Barnave person . . . gaining time. As you say, she has a brain, and she knows the game's out of the hands of the Assembly already. It's Europe against Paris now, or against certain gentlemen who have taught the Paris mob how to howl and fight for a dozen things it doesn't understand. The Powers of Europe could win in a week if they wanted

to . . . and if Paris hadn't got her, with her husband and children, as hostages. But, as it is——!"

"'If they wanted to'." Count Merci D'Argenteau echoed the words softly over the brim of his coffee-cup. "M. Fersen, I have spent my life watching and working with what you call the Powers of Europe. Now that I'm supposed to have retired, they seem to keep me busier than I was as ambassador. You've been a soldier till lately; you are only just getting your introduction to Diplomacy, the introduction I had some thirty years ago. May I extend to you my sympathy, M. Fersen, my very sincere sympathy?"

Axel rose impatiently. "All of which," he said, "is a long-winded way of telling me that the Powers won't march until they're quite sure it is to their interest to do so. Well, it's my business, among other things, to persuade them that it *is* to their interest. It's my business to see that the Queen isn't left too long with her optimistic M. Barnave, leading him by his optimistic nose and waiting for help from Austria and Prussia that never comes. . . . Even King Gustav seems to have cooled off a little since he went back from Aachen. I and Taube are trying to persuade him that things are more, not less urgent, since our failure at Varennes."

He was belatedly accepting the offer he had refused, pouring himself out a cup of coffee with a hand that seemed unsteady with emotion. Count Merci could not help noticing it, and tried to speak in a more sympathetic tone.

"She is playing with everyone," he said. "She is trying to lead everyone by the nose—Barnave, the Assembly, even Austria and Prussia. She must. They're playing with her. It's all a game, and a very discreditable one. I don't mean discreditable to the players—I repeat, they can't help themselves: the Father of Lies achieved his masterpiece when he invented foreign politics. I mean discreditable to Human Nature, to this sad world into which we were all pitched, with our instinct to survive, to save others, to fight for whatever we happen to think worth a battle . . . or worth a stratagem. Only fools could blame her . . . or even blame her enemies. I only thank God that she's got three men to advise her—you, me and M. Barnave—whose motives are not entirely political—

even if you and I have to do the advising in cypher letters from Brussels."

"I know nothing of Barnave's unpolitical motives," said Axel with a touch of jealousy. "Politically he'd call himself a 'Moderate', I suppose, one of the crew that want a tame King tied up in a Constitution they've drafted to suit themselves. If the Assembly offers her something she can accept and if he persuades her to accept it, there'll be another orgy of mutual handshakings and congratulations, and all will be happy and comfortable for a month or two. And then——!"

"And then——?"

Fersen swallowed his cup of coffee and looked his host in the eyes. "M. Merci D'Argenteau," he said, "you implied just now that I did not know how much filth there was in foreign politics. But I know something about the home politics of France that M. Barnave is either ignoring or suppressing. I know that there are men who do not want things to be happy and comfortable, men who have gambled all they have on a much more sweeping Revolution than any they've engineered yet; and they'll stick at nothing to avoid losing their gamble! Let's be charitable, as you try to be, and say they can't help themselves, though that's hardly the point. The point is that they can and they will spoil all M. Barnave's pleasant arrangements, all that he persuades the Queen to accept. They'll go on spoiling everything that might lead to a settlement, until someone stops them. And I know of nothing to stop them, except bullets, and plenty of them."

He was tearing a little roll of fancy bread in his fingers. He threw it down uneaten, marched round the table and swung himself down into an armchair by the brightly-crackling fire. Merci watched him round and did not speak until after he was settled.

"I suppose you mean Austrian and Prussian bullets," he said quietly. "A Crusade of Kings against Mobs, Order against Anarchy, Right, as it seems to us, against Wrong. The Powers may possibly overcome their jealousies and decide that such a Crusade will be profitable. But you know what'll happen, don't you, if the French suspect that Austria and Prussia are marching at her suggestion, even with her approval. They'll

kill her. She'll be dead before a single Austrian or Prussian soldier piles arms in the Square of *Notre-Dame*. And if you persuade her to approve, you'll be partly responsible for her death." He paused, wiped the crumbs from his mouth and looked straight before him along the table. "You and I," he said, "are cosmopolitans. We believe in Europe, in Christendom, perhaps, in Order and Decency. So do the French, but they believe first in France. I am told that they're beginning to hear the word 'Nation' from their mob-orators almost more often than they hear the word 'Liberty'. Do you want the Queen of France to be the first victim of their Nationalism? Ask yourself that question, will you, before you write to her again?"

There was a long pause. Fersen shifted his riding-boots on the fender and put his hands over his face. Then he suddenly clapped them on to the arms of the chair and levered himself upright. His eyes burnt eagerly, but one could not help noticing the dark patches beneath them, the tired lines that puckered his forehead and temples.

"I'm not going to write to her at all," he said. "I'm going to see her. I'm riding this morning. I might be in the Tuileries by to-morrow night." The nearness seemed to give him new energy. "I've taken every precaution I can," he said, "but if I'm caught, I'm caught. I brought this, to ask you if you'd lock it up for me till I come back—or, if I don't come back, to send it to Sweden, to my sister. Baron Taube would forward it for you." He pulled a sealed package from his pocket and put it on the table. "As you say, I'm a beginner at diplomacy, but I've learnt already that you can get nothing done until you come face to face with people, talk to them and let them talk to you. I'm tired of letters and *memoranda*. I sometimes wish paper had never been invented!"

Count Merci tried to conceal his surprise. He had half-risen from his chair and now he completed the movement with slow deliberation. The pause gave him time to weigh the chances and decide that it was quite useless to try and dissuade Fersen from the journey on which he had obviously set his heart. "You have my good wishes," he said. "That goes without saying. You have my admiration and respect. I can only hope

that Paris is not so dangerous, or so watchful, as I have reason to fear. I will not increase your danger by asking you to carry any written message to the Queen from an ex-ambassador of Austria. But I hope you will give her my . . . my very deep affection." He looked at Fersen, as if envying him his comparative youth, the fire that smouldered in his tired eyes. "But you haven't told me yet," he said, "what you are going to talk to her about. May I ask? I have some claim to know, and she is in considerable danger."

Fersen hesitated a moment. "I recognise your claim," he said, "but I have not the time to explain my plans. I can only assure you that they are designed to secure her safety—even from the nationalists. I do not entirely agree with you. I think that the advance of two armies—utterly beyond their present power to resist—might frighten them into surrendering their hostages rather than drive them to murder. But I'm not prepared to back that opinion to the extent of hazarding her life as well as her husband's. I'm hoping to save both."

HE HAD TAKEN EVERY PRECAUTION. The disguises, the false passports, the lodging in Madame Sullivan's attic, where for some nights, even Crauford did not discover that he was in the house. He knew how to get into the Louvre and from the Louvre into the Tuileries; there were too many stairs and passages, too many floors that had given way and mouldering panels that could conceal a secret entrance, for M. De La Fayette's sentries to guard them all, especially from a man who had staked his life on a certain interview. He came to it with a definite proposal, could demand a 'Yes' or 'No', and had good hope of a 'Yes'. There was only one thing which he had forgotten: he had seen neither King nor Queen for eight months.

He had been in touch with Marie-Antoinette, if only by letter. He knew what eight months had done for her. He knew that she was still hankering for the sight of the white uniforms of Austria, even the Prussian blue, outside the windows of the Tuileries. He knew that Merci was right in his opinion that such hankering might be the threshold of her

tomb. An European Congress sounded less threatening, though, even so, there must be armies in the background. It was possible that France might respond to the suggestion that a mere feint of invasion might drive the extremists underground, and bring Loyalty and Common Sense into the sunlight again. But the risk was appalling, especially for those who thought unpolitically towards the Queen. Fersen knew that he would never persuade her to forget her hankering. But neither invasion nor Congress (flattering the Revolution even while it threatened) could be relied upon for success, while King and Queen were Hostages at the mercy of a mob. There must be another flight . . . not in a family coach, with postmasters kneeling at the King's feet or riding across country to warn his enemies. The Royal Family must move by separate and devious routes, in such disguises as enabled hundreds of priests and royalists and foreign spies to traverse the country with forged passports and hardly risk their heads.

Marie-Antoinette made one condition only. She would not go unless her children and her husband went. There had never been any question of that. How and when were the only questions, or seemed to be, until she and Fersen, with their resolve taken, went into the King's room. It was then that Fersen realised what eight months would do.

Louis was a little plaintive, especially about the *émigrés* and the way in which his brothers, Provence and D'Artois, had been behaving in Germany, representing him as a spineless prisoner whose every act must be disregarded as taken under pressure. He had been under certain pressure, at times: he had sent them certain powers, to be used at discretion. They had used them without discretion, without thought or sense. They, and not he, were debasing the Royal dignity by their refusal to compromise, to see anything but pure evil in the grand dreams of Revolution.

He sat there, his books and maps about him, listening with dumb ears to what his wife and her worshipper had planned. He confessed to past mistakes, to weakness, even, though he insisted that his position had been more painful, more unparalleled, than anyone could appreciate. He had been, like King Richard in the song of the banqueters, abandoned by all

the world. He was pathetically grateful to Fersen for this visit, this risk taken. But he would not hear of another escape, he would not begin to contemplate it.

"Very closely guarded, you know," was his first objection; and Marie-Antoinette, watching him, knew that it was but a mask. "Quite impossible for us to get out."

"I got in," said Fersen, and cut no inch of ice.

It was some minutes before the mask was lifted, the real objection revealed. "I promised them I wouldn't escape again," said King Louis. "I gave them my word," he said.

There was pathos in his obstinacy. Fersen, studying his face, saw the trace of enforced idleness; it was many months since he had felt a horse between his legs or tasted the familiar pleasures of fresh air and the pursuit of game beneath the green trees of Meudon. There was a sickliness in his features, an added lethargy upon his slow and honest brain. He, too, might hope for foreign troops to rescue him, but he would not move a finger to make them march. He returned to his grievance against the exiles and against his *émigré* brothers. "I can deal with my enemies myself," he quoted from Voltaire, "but God preserve me from my friends."

The uncharacteristic cynicism seemed doubly inapt. It jarred against something in his attitude that was not exactly lethargy, nor even the hesitation to take any decision which had ruined his Kingship. There was growing in this man, self-centred, self-doubting, and yet irritatingly immovable, a certain devious resolve, that one could not but admire. King Louis, like the King Charles whose portrait hung above him, seemed to be groping inarticulately towards the conclusion that one who had failed in Kingship may yet earn the martyr's crown. "I gave them my Royal word," he repeated. "My word as a Christian."

His wife turned to look at her lover, both knowing that he had come to Paris and risked his life in vain. Fersen must go back, into exile and despair, with the memory of a rather gross husband whom one must at the last admire.

He carried few other memories away with him. If any picture was stamped on his mind, apart from that of dank underground passages to be threaded and sleepy sentries to

be dodged, it was of himself and the woman he loved sitting beside the fire, long after her husband was in bed, chatting of their past into the small hours of a winter's morning. It was so perhaps that a kindlier Destiny had planned that they should sit; it was for this perhaps that they had been born, thirty-five years ago, within the space of the same two short months, though sundered from each other by the width of Europe. When they had crossed that width and met, it was already too late; she was married to another and on the threshold of Queenship; there was no chance of their sharing the ultimate intimacies, unless they stooped to ignoble stealth. Eighteen years had passed since then, with many partings and reunions. Now they could only sit together and talk them over beside a dying fire. They could not even talk of the future—of the years of aimless exile that awaited him, the unimportant Eleanoras, and the ache for what might have been, nor of redoubled humiliations and imprisonment that loomed above her head. But it was something to sit so, in that shadowy palace of the past, and look with love upon each other's face.

They parted for ever in the chill February morning, and no man can tell what had passed between them. Long ago the ladies of Versailles had complained that their handsome Fersen returned from America with half his good looks ruined by sun and rain and the hardships of war, and his more recent anxieties and exertions had not been such as to restore or preserve beauty. Time, Varennes and the Tuileries had dealt even more disastrously with her, blanching the auburn hair and furrowing her cheek with wrinkles. But it was perhaps on this night of furtive entry, and perhaps for the first time in eighteen years, that the lovers slept for an hour or two within each other's arms.

There can be no certainty. Their secret has died with them, as such secrets should. Those who would prove that they were incapable of such indulgence, those who pile up the evidence to show that they had indulged a thousand times already, in happier days and nights, are alike ignorant of the nature of Evidence, the meaning of Proof. A man of our own times may argue that their whole story turns upon this fleshly riddle, that

until it is answered it is useless to write their story: he may even argue that only fools would answer it in the name of what they call Virtue. Such a man may feel secure in his worldly wisdom, in what other fools call Common Sense: he may have read deeply in the changing Sciences and Pseudo-sciences of his day. But he has one lesson still to learn in the changeless school of Love.

III

"BUT I WANT TO DANCE!" PROTESTED SOPHIE, stamping a still pretty foot. "I want to dance, dance, dance! You say you're in love with me, Evert, you say my lightest wish is your pleasure. And yet you refuse to take me to a ball."

She flounced up and down her mother's drawing-room, trying to feel as young and wayward as her words implied. In truth, if she could have been honest with herself, it was a fast vanishing youth that she strove to recapture—and strove in vain. She and this man who called himself her lover would be better employed sitting by the fire in her own home, chatting like a middle-aged couple, rather than braving this bitter March night to find entertainment at a dance.

"There are at least three objections," said Evert Taube gravely, "to the course you propose. There is the weather. There is your husband——"

"Out of Stockholm," interrupted Sophie. "He need never know. We'll go separately—and masked. And, even if some busybody saw us there together, and told him, he wouldn't grudge me an evening's pleasure. He is—very kind to me. More than I deserve."

She bit her lip as she spoke, cutting short the sentence. Her parents would be coming back soon, and there would be an end of all conversation except about trivialities. She looked at Taube like a naughty child, and the glance made her wish she could love him as he appeared to love her. If she could only do that, it would not matter whether or no she wronged her husband.

"Thirdly," said Taube with a smile of indulgence, "there is the fact that it is Friday to-night, and there are no dances to which I could take you—or (since we must be secretive) at which I could contrive to meet you."

He had had to give up soldiering since he was wounded. He had become a Court Chamberlain, a diplomat on occasions.

The change had curiously affected his way of talking, even his face. At fifty, he was beginning to grow up.

"Well," said Sophie petulantly, "that's the only one of your reasons that seems of any importance. I don't know what's happened to Stockholm since the war. No dances, no nothing! It's not as if this were France, and we were having a revolution."

"No." Taube seemed to deliberate a moment, gazing into the bright fire that blazed beneath the granite coat-of-arms on the Fersen chimney. "No. We do things differently in Sweden. But I sometimes wonder whether King Gustav is any safer than King Louis."

"What on earth do you mean?" Sophie opened her grey eyes at him in genuine surprise. "I know Father's friends have been talking a lot lately—but they always did that, ever since I was a little girl. And the King made pretty fools of them in the House of Peers this time. He didn't even have to arrest anybody."

She stretched out her foot and began to kick a log back into its place in the fire. It seemed absurd, with Count Fredrik out of the room, that she should find herself talking politics with Evert.

"May I repeat," he answered gravely, "that we have different ways of doing things in Sweden? And may I add quickly, before your father comes in, that I only wish the King's opponents—enemies—were all as wise and honourable as he and his friends?"

The door opened as he spoke and Count Fredrik entered. "My wife asked me to make her apologies," he said. "I am afraid she will not be returning before you leave us."

He spoke as if he had no desire to see Taube stay overlong. Sophie noticed that he had a newspaper under his arm, and was probably itching to read.

"Any news from France?" she asked, pointing to it.

"Plenty." Count Fredrik's face was stern. "But nothing likely to involve Axel—if that's what you are anxious about. There seems little doubt that the Powers will soon declare war on France; that will close the Netherland frontier and prevent your brother indulging in any more of his mad journeys to

Paris. I only hope that our precious King Gustav will not drag Sweden into war, before she has recovered from the wounds she received through his Finnish follies. Oh, and talking of wounds——” he turned politely to his guest, who had already risen.

“Mine is healed,” said Taube, approaching him to take leave. “A slight limp, as you see. And I bear King Gustav no grudge for it. The Tsarina needed a reminder that we are not all her paid servants.”

The newspaper slipped to the ground as Count Fredrik extended his hand, and Sophie picked it up. Her eye ran quickly over the foreign news and she was soon turning to the announcements of lighter things in Stockholm. She could not help noticing that Taube gave her one glance that seemed almost to bespeak a guilty conscience.

“Well, about that,” said Count Fredrik, almost grimly, “you and I must agree to differ. I suppose I should not think too hardly of the King. He outwitted us at the two last Riksdags, but I do not think he can be leading a very enjoyable life at present. They say he is becoming a positive hermit at Haga.”

“He comes into Stockholm for plays and dances still,” said Sophie. “He’s not beaten yet.”

“Yes—and whom does he meet?” asked her father, standing foursquare before his fire. “None of the best people will be seen at the theatre to greet him—and as for the masked balls! Bank-clerks and their wives, tradespeople even, with a sprinkling of Customs officers, and minor secretaries—I wish King Gustav joy of his fellow-dancers. I suppose he has to appear pleased with them, in the hope that they’ll vote for his supporters in the lower Houses next time he holds a Riksdag. Sophie, ring for the servant to show Baron Taube out.”

“Well, as you say”—Taube was half-way to the door—“there are some matters on which we must agree to differ. Some of the King’s public appearances may be a trifle shoddy nowadays—but I do not think that is altogether his fault.”

There was a breath of cold air in the passage as the door opened and a footman appeared on the threshold.

"You are not going to say good night to me?" asked Sophie. "I think I know the reason." She held out the paper as she spoke, her finger-nail pressing deeply into it, to mark what she had been reading.

He came back to her, with a slightly apologetic air. "I insist on your buying two," she said, "shoddy or not. And then I shall understand you not saying good night."

"That sounds a little mysterious," said Count Fredrik, as his guest took the paper from Sophie. "What is this present you are demanding from Baron Taube? I don't understand."

"You're not meant to, Father. You wouldn't approve!" She snatched the paper from Taube, refolded it, and returned it to her father. "You may go, Henrik," she said to the footman. "I will see Baron Taube to the door myself."

Left to himself, her father was soon buried in the news from France. There was little doubt of the war, little doubt that King Gustav would do his best to make Sweden play a leading part in the crusade against the Jacobins. But it looked as if the Allies would reach Paris from the Netherlands before a single Swedish regiment could be landed from the Channel. And it was certainly the business of every good patriot to see how many hindrances and delays could be put between an unscrupulous King and his Quixotic determination to waste good Swedish blood.

It was not until he had digested the front page and made a few mental notes of friends to be seen, plans to be concocted, that he turned over to run a lofty eye over the lesser announcements. He would hardly have stopped to read but for the deep imprint of a little finger-nail that marked one out for his attention.

'FRIDAY the 16th of MARCH,' he read. 'MASKED BALL at the ROYAL OPERA HOUSE. 10.30 P.M. TICKETS on sale at the ROYAL OPERA HOUSE Booking-office, and at the entrance to the Masquerade.'

He walked to the window. The thick snow muffled the sound of wheels. But Baron Taube's cab had already departed, and Sophie's coach was rolling away towards the centre of the city.

KING GUSTAV HAD BEEN TO THE PLAY. It was a French play, acted by a travelling company from Paris: in spite of the complaints of young ladies, Stockholm still had its share of entertainment.

It was late when he reached the Opera House, and the dancing had begun. He made straight for his private room behind the Royal Box: here the sounds of music penetrated dimly through the close-fitting doors: here candles twinkled on a supper-table set for five.

One was Young George Löwenhjelm, who had been walking or sleighing all day with the King, in the country round Haga. With them was Baron Bjelke, and Hans Essen, in a new equerry's uniform. But when supper was finished, and Gustav had risen to throw himself on a red sofa against the wall, the fifth place at table was still empty and unused.

Löwenhjelm took it upon himself to comment on Armfelt's unpunctuality. "I wonder what Mauritz is doing," he said, "to make him so late. I'll wager he's up to some mischief."

"You've no right to talk!" King Gustav was in the highest of spirits. "You know perfectly well you've been longing to ruin your digestion by swallowing my excellent supper whole and running down to your little sweetheart at the dance."

"Will Your Majesty be dancing to-night?" asked Baron Bjelke, pulling out his watch. "It is after eleven."

"No. Yes. I don't know yet," answered Gustav. "I can't say I feel in a mood for dancing. And I have no young minx awaiting me on the floor." The King sighed—a genuine-sounding sigh. Löwenhjelm was blushing: Löwenhjelm was very young. Essen pushed back his chair and sent the servant for coffee. "And give us a pinch of your snuff," he said to Bjelke, who had pocketed his watch and drawn out a little gold snuff-box.

"Careful of the lid," said Bjelke, handing it across, "the hinge is broken. I was meaning to send it to the jeweller to-night."

"I hope Mauritz will have had supper somewhere," said Gustav, lying back on the sofa. "He's like a bear with a sore head when he isn't fed properly." He smiled at Essen and beckoned to him for a pinch of Bjelke's snuff. Bjelke was

muttering something uncomplimentary about Mauritz Armfelt: he was given to disliking everyone who was more successful than he had been himself.

"You'd much better run along," said the King to Löwenhjelm, "than sit there fidgeting. We all know you prefer her kisses to my coffee."

"If His Majesty will excuse me——" began Löwenhjelm, rising and looking nervously round the circle of the older men.

"I'll excuse you if you'll promise to be discreet," said Gustav, "and not babble State secrets all over the Masquerade. Stockholm's a mass of Spies just now. You know that French fellow we saw on the stage to-night—what is his name? La Perrière, that's it! Liljensparre tells me he's an out-and-out Jacobin. Robespierre probably sent him to Stockholm to report on my plans of campaign against their God-damned revolution. Curious he should be such a good actor. I wonder if he'll come to the masquerade to-night."

"If he does," said young Löwenhjelm stiffly, "Your Majesty can rely upon it that he will overhear nothing from me."

As Löwenhjelm bowed and retired, he almost collided with Badin and the coffee. The negro placed his tray on the table and then handed a small triangle of paper to the King.

"Since Your Majesty has mentioned it," said Essen, "I think more precautions should be taken against Spies and—and suchlike. Your Majesty has reminded us that the Jacobins, who are not exactly scrupulous, have many agents in Stockholm. They certainly have principles—and principles that might infect and join up with the old aristocratic opposition that Your Majesty so happily outwitted twenty years ago——"

"Oh, since then!" said Gustav brightly. "I've been out-witting them all my reign." He glanced up from unfolding his paper—at the dusky face of his waiting servant, at Baron Bjelke, fingering his snuff-box and looking unaccountably uneasy.

"Exactly," persisted Essen. "And the last two Riksdags were perhaps the most humiliating the House of Peers has ever known. It does not occur to Your Majesty that some members might be all the more eager for revenge this last year? It does not occur to Your Majesty that the Jacobins——"

"You cannot mix oil and water," murmured Gustav, reading. "The two won't—at least——" He suddenly propped his elbows on his knees and began to study the note with unexpected intensity. "Curious," he said. "Very curious. There seems to be a little of the mixture here. Badin!"

"Master?"

"Who brought this?"

"The boy-page, Tigerstedt. He give it me. He say it came from a soldier in the Blue Guard."

"I see." The King drew out a little pocket magnifying-glass and ran it over the note. "No. I don't think I need bother," he said, tossing the paper to Essen. "Give them to Liljensparre in the morning. He'll probably use a microscope on it, to detect what kind of pencil the idiot used. I always feel safe when I think of having Liljensparre for my Chief of Police—to say nothing of Badin here for my Black Guard. Liljensparre is always detecting something. He and that fellow Fouché in France will be adding a new word to all the languages soon—detectors or detectives or something. What's the matter, Essen?"

"I think Your Majesty is very unwise," said Essen, rising, "to treat a letter like this so lightly. After all, it is a plain warning of——"

"Good God, Hans! What have I been having by every post for the last nineteen years except plain warnings, prophecies of doom, notices to quit this idiotic world? Especially lately. Dozens this year—and it's only March yet. The Ides of March are come! Are they, by the way? Bjelke, you're a scholar of sorts. When were the Ides of March? It's the sixteenth to-day."

Essen stood with his hands clenched tight on the back of the chair, his eyes on the scattered remnants of supper. "I think," he said, "Your Majesty used the phrase 'Especially lately'. May I suggest that such a multiplication of warnings suggests some multiplication of dangers? This note seems to be written by a member of a definite conspiracy—presumably in last-minute penitence. His fellow-conspirators are not likely to share his feelings!"

"Are you trying to frighten me Hans?"

King Gustav looked narrowly at the immovable Essen, and then at the African face that seemed now childlike, now menacing and sinister above the flickering candles. "The Ides of March," he whispered again, and then suddenly leapt up to fling open a cupboard in the wall. "What are you two going to wear?" he said suddenly. "It's time we went!" He dragged out a three-cornered hat, a little cloak of Venetian pattern, and a narrow mask of yellow silk.

"Your Majesty is not going to dance!" Essen had woken to life again, was striding round the table in agonised anxiety. "This letter expressly says that the Masquerade is the appointed place——"

"That letter can go to the devil—or to Liljensparre," interrupted Gustav, "and you with it! It is your fault I'm going to dance. You both try to frighten me, you and the letter, and you can both go under Liljensparre's microscope." He whirled the silk cloak round him, so that the candles fluttered again and strange shadows danced along the gilded ceiling. "Here's a domino and a mask for you, Bjelke," he said. "Hans here will probably want to come in a coat of mail."

"If Your Majesty would excuse me," said Bjelke, rising hastily, "I have my own costume at home. If——"

"What's wrong with mine? No time to go home now. It's close on midnight." King Gustav walked to the mirror and began to adjust his mask.

"I wanted——" began Bjelke, in a curiously embarrassed way. "I was going to take this watch to my goldsmith. It's always going wrong and it's most important for me—that is . . ."

His voice trailed away. He was left twisting the watch in his obviously shaking hands. Gustav saw his reflection in the mirror and could not repress a laugh.

"So you're frightened, too?" he chuckled. "And so frightened that you can't remember what it is that wants mending. Ten minutes ago it was your snuff-box." He took the grey domino he had offered Bjelke, threw it over Essen's shoulders and handed him a mask. "Badin, you big black rascal," he said, "take that letter to Herr Liljensparre and try to find out which of the Blue Guard gave it to Tigerstedt. We must tell Pontus

not to let his men hand these inflammatory notes round my Palace. It's bad for discipline among my equerries."

He slipped his arm through Essen's and threw open the little door that led out into the Royal Box. A blare of music, an atmosphere of perfume and humanity at revel, came surging into the room. He drew Essen towards it, let go his arm, and whispered: "Masquerade." Then he stepped out into the box.

He had been wearing all his Orders for the theatre, and now he did not attempt to cover them with his meagre silk cloak. The mask did not cover a half of his features. He stood for five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, watching the gaily-coloured pattern of dancers, among whom a number of black dominoes seemed to move with curious hesitation. Then he turned to Essen. "If they wanted to have a shot at me," he said, "they've missed their chance of a fine mark. Now let's go down and dance."

SOPHIE HAD KNOWN IT WAS a mistake from the moment she arrived. She was still loath to admit that she was growing too old for dances. But to be kept waiting in the dank entrance passage, with the trampled snow and the smell of wet umbrellas—that was intolerable. She cursed herself for arriving so promptly on the stroke of half-past ten, instead of coming late and making Evert wait for *her*.

Her father had been right. By the cheapness of the masks and costumes, by the coarse tones and silly giggles of each new arrival, she could tell that there were not many of her own class at these subscription dances nowadays. If only Evert would come!

They had arranged costumes on the doorstep of her father's house. He was to wear a black domino, unusual and easily recognisable. But she had not been waiting five minutes before a couple of black dominoes came in together, and then a third who was clearly not Evert. Angrier than ever, she bought her own ticket, from a suspicious old woman behind a barrier of dingy wire, and plunged straight into the ballroom.

She still moved with youthful grace, still had sufficient air

about her to attract invitations to dance. It amused her—since she had decided to be abandoned for an evening—to find herself listening to idiotic compliments from young shop-walkers, or avoiding the clumsy gestures of a wheezing merchant. But her amusement was tempered by a strange feeling of emptiness, of dissatisfaction with herself for ever having come. She kept a sharp eye open for someone in a black domino who limped a little as he walked, but it was midnight before she saw any but the first three whose arrival she had witnessed. And then there seemed to be eight or ten in the room.

The King had come out, standing up in his box with one of his equerries. There was no applause, for a masquerade enforced incognitos: but some of the dancers began to whisper to each other with snobbish excitement.

It was then that she made her mistake. She approached one group of three black dominoes, making sure that the foremost was Evert, until he turned to speak to his companions.

"I tell you he's coming down to dance," she heard him say in a voice she could not recognise. "I was at the goldsmith's, and the Baron sent his watch, not his snuff-box. Don't you trust the Baron?"

She was sufficiently puzzled to try and remain within hearing, though she caught but little of the reply: it was something about trusting nobody, and about Pontus writing a letter at the last moment. She gave them a glance as she glided away. One of the strange group had lifted his deep black mask to scratch his cheek. And she saw that he wore a beard.

She turned away to find Evert approaching her at last. He was full of apologies. He had been busy: he had been with the Commander of the Bodyguard, with Duke Carl, with Liljen-sparre at the Police Office: he had been here, there and everywhere. He was sure that trouble was brewing in Stockholm, that there would be riots out in the streets. Too many loiterers seemed to be tramping the muddy snow for no good reason: too many officials and grandees seemed to be in a high state of nerves. He begged her to come home at once.

"Without dancing at all?" she said pettishly, her heart

longing to fall in with his anxiety and make for home. "I must say, you are the oddest lover I've ever had!"

He pleaded his lameness, made worse, he said, by so much running round the town. His eye never seemed to leave the doors, as if he were longing to escape or—to do him justice—longing to get her away. She told him to sit down and rest. She told him to go and get a drink for himself. "The beer will be cheap!" she said, with a sneer at the entertainment she had herself suggested. She insisted, perversely enough, on dancing at least one more dance with anyone she could entice into inviting her.

She did not succeed. As she passed through the masked throng, she saw a figure in yellow silk approach, shining with Orders. She told herself she did not want the King to recognise her, though he would be the last person to bear tales to her father or husband. He seemed blithe enough, but there was something about him that suddenly made her heart stop beating, her knees feel weak beneath her. She stood for a moment, battling with herself to analyse and defeat the reasonless sensation.

She forced herself to look at him again. There was nothing sinister about him, no cloud on his brow; there was a luminous cheerfulness, an innocence even, that many of his deeds belied. The cloud was round him and about him, perhaps only in her imagination, perhaps among the black dominoes that seemed to be edging towards him, closing round to entrap their King.

She turned and ran. She came panting to the place where she had left Evert, and found him still waiting, still undisguisedly anxious.

"Evert," she said, all dignity and affectation gone, "Evert! Take me home!"

They hurried through the crowd. The music had struck up, the dance was beginning. She threaded her way between the figures, with Evert limping in her rear. She did not stop until she was out of the ballroom, almost out of sound of the musicians. She leant for a moment against the cold wall of the passage, to recover her breath and let Evert catch her up.

As he passed the doors she noticed with surprise that they

were swung to behind him, with hasty violence. She caught a glimpse beyond of the uniform of the King's bodyguard.

Not caring to puzzle out what could have happened, she turned for the street entrance. A man was hurrying in towards them, unmasked and white of face. As he pushed her aside, imagining her, no doubt, to be some townsman's wife, she saw that it was Mauritz Armfelt. She heard him try the doors and hammer on them for admittance. They must have opened, for a rough voice said: "You can come in, but you'll not be allowed out again. No one's allowed out."

She did not wait to hear what Armfelt replied, nor to guess at what was afoot. She caught Evert's arm. It was now he who was hurrying her forward.

"Yes. Home," he said, as they emerged upon the frozen quayside and saw the cold white mass of the Palace beyond the snow-strewn bridge. "Home. And I wish to God I'd never let you come."

THE BLACK DOMINOES HAD closed round the King. He had not recognised his danger, wondering only at the clumsy dancing of his good townfolk. They had not dared to risk a shot at the Royal Box: now they would have him at their mercy before a trigger need be pulled. They had their signals, enjoying all the *macabre* play-acting of conspiracy. When all was ready, and the King hemmed in beyond power of escape, Clas Horn tapped him on the shoulder. "*Bon soir, beau Masque*," he said.

As the King turned, there was the report of a pistol, dully muffled by the thickness of silk and satin cloaks. He felt a hot agony above his hip, felt himself stumble forward and clutch at a woman's skirt. Had he fallen, they would have been down upon him in a moment: Anckarström had a second pistol, to say nothing of a knife. But Essen was dashing between: young Löwenhjelm, leaving his sweetheart, ran in with flashing sword. The black dominoes retired, mixing with the crowd. In a moment, as if by magic, the doors were clapped to, the guards stood foursquare at every entrance.

The musicians played still, the dance straggled fitfully on.

Half the company knew nothing of what was happening. Only in one corner, King Gustav was being helped to the stairway, half carried up to the supper-room. They laid him on the red sofa, took off the yellow coat, its silk lining still smouldering—and found his breeches soaked in blood. “If you catch the man that did it,” he said, “be sure not to hurt him.” And again, a few minutes later, “A pity it was in the back. I’ve been in battle and faced bullets. I wish they hadn’t shot from behind.”

His chief solicitude was to tell everyone that there was nothing much amiss, that the wound was a mere scratch; his next to prevent the newly-arrived Armfelt from breaking down into womanish tears. He sent to ask if the actor, La Perrière, was in the ballroom, hoping that the would-be assassin was a Jacobin and Frenchman. When news arrived that La Perrière had gone straight home to bed from the theatre, he looked downcast for the first time. “Then it must have been a Swede,” he said, sadly. “One of my own countrymen.”

It would not be long before they knew who it was, and even who had been his accomplice. Liljensparre was in command of the dancing-floor, was cross-questioning every man and woman who had worn a mask that night. Already his policeman had picked up a knife from the floor, filed and hacked into murderous jaggedness: beside it were two pistols, one loaded and one already fired: Liljensparre’s messengers were already flitting round Stockholm, rousing gunmakers and locksmiths from their beds, summoning them to the Town Hall to report on all firearms sold, all repairs effected for the last few months. It would not be more than a day or so before the pencil-note was also traced to its source—Captain Pontus of the King’s own Bodyguard. Meanwhile, Liljensparre, a hard-featured little man, with lips as tight as pincers, was established at a small table in the centre of the dancing floor. One by one the company must march up to it, give name and dwelling-place, and answer whatever other question was barked or whispered at them. Clas Horn had slipped out, with the adroitness of cowardice, before ever the doors were locked. Bjelke had contrived to follow his servant home, the watch safely delivered to his jeweller. The others stood up well to the

police-captain's fire. Only Anckarström, lingering to the last, made the error of bravado.

"I hope you will not suspect me," he said.

"Why should I?" asked Liljensparre, and answered his own question as he spoke.

THEY HAD FOUND A SURGEON at last, good Dr. Hallman from the Jakobs Gata. He cut away the yellow silk and gently felt the edges of the lacerated flesh. He was still panting with his run through the streets, his hurried climb upstairs.

"When you've done puffing and blowing at me," said Gustav with a friendly smile, "perhaps you'll tell me your verdict. I'm King of Sweden, and if I'm going to die there will be certain little matters I ought to attend to first. I won't have you hiding things from me."

The portly doctor rose from his knees beside the sofa. "I would advise Your Majesty," he said, "to allow himself to be conveyed back to the Palace. I will fetch my instruments meanwhile and then I can make a proper examination and see how far the bullet has penetrated."

He was already telling a kindly lie. It was not a question of one bullet, but of two, as well as a dozen slugs: and, unknown to the King, he had already felt the mouth of the ghastly wound, and plucked out a rusty nail.

They brought a litter with four stout gentlemen to carry it. They bore him downstairs and out into the bitter night. The torches sparkled along the Ström Gata and lit the parapets of the Norbro bridge: they glinted with eerie splendour on the strange procession—the blue coats of the Guard, the gold-laced robes of Palace ministers, the dominoes and fancy dresses of the crestfallen Masquerade. At last they flared high up upon the white walls of the Palace and into the lofty hall with its granite stairs. Step by step, King Gustav was borne towards the Audience Room, the room that had seen his triumphs of wit and intrigue and splendour, and now bid fair

to be the gateway to his tomb. But as they mounted the steps, with every slight jolt a pang of agony, the imp peeped out behind the suffering mask.

"Do you know what I feel like?" he whispered to Armfelt. "I feel like the Pope being carried from St. Peter's to the Vatican."

IV

PRINCE CARL OF VASA-HOLSTEIN-GOTTORP, Duke of Södermanland, Admiral of the Swedish Navy, was looking at himself in the tall mirror that stood in the corner of his room. It was not so much his stiff, uninteresting face that he was inspecting, as the brilliant military uniform, the sword-belt and sabre he had buckled on, the feathered hat with which he had crowned his square head. Like his brother Gustav, he seemed to like fine clothes: but he apparently enjoyed wearing them himself rather than designing them for others.

It was midnight and he was alone. There was no one to ask why he had chosen such an hour, this freezing night, to stay up and get into uniform, instead of following his more sensible custom of getting into bed. There was a masked ball at the Opera, but such entertainments did not tempt him. He was not particularly attractive to the opposite sex, but, if he had decided to embark on an amorous adventure, his wealth and position should have secured him any reasonable conquest without the donning of the brightly-coloured panoply of war. The whole affair was a little mysterious, and the puzzled, nervous face which looked back at him from the mirror suggested that he, too, was anxious about some mystery or at least some uncertainty. Occasionally he cocked his ear as if for a messenger. Once he even went to the window and peeped through its curtains into the snow-bound street. He came back to the mirror and continued his scrutiny of his own person: but there was still nothing to explain why it was so martially clothed.

Nervousness was perhaps pardonable in one placed as he was placed. Next brother to a King, it would be pleasanter to have no connection with the Royal Family than to be burdened with a King's embarrassments while denied his powers. He was not even heir: there was an odd little, obstinate little Gustav growing up in the Royal Palaces, refusing to walk about the Royal gardens, and insisting—at fourteen—that he must be

carried pick-a-back by his favourite Guardsman. Duke Carl was hardly to be blamed for wondering, in the secret places of his heart, whether Sweden (should anything happen to her King Gustav III) might not be better governed by his brother than by an unpromising Gustav IV. He could only guess how far Sweden agreed with him. It would not have been flattering to his vanity to know that she would only do so after long endurance of the alternative, that many years must pass before a Carl XIII, gorgeously uniformed, but now weighed down by sixty winters, could step up to the Swedish throne—to bequeath it, a short time after, to the son of a provincial attorney from the French Pyrenees.

There was a wave of scarlet in the candlelit mirror as he swung round and faced doorwards. He could hear steps in the passage. The messenger was coming, Destiny was coming down the passage. There was a loud knock, loud enough to set his heart thumping. He suddenly regretted that he had not gone to bed, so as to be found in an easily explicable condition. But it was too late now: he could not wait another instant to know the truth. "Come in!" he said without a tremor in his voice.

The messenger proved to be the slightly cross-eyed little man who took charge of King Gustav's private suite at the Opera. Duke Carl heard him out, still keeping his composure. He expressed his horror and resentment, his fears for his wounded brother. He refrained from mentioning Bjelke's name, perhaps the only name he knew or could guess at. But while things were still in the balance, Duke Carl could not prevent himself from asking whether the horrible affair in the Opera House had been the signal for any disturbance, any fires started or barricades raised, any concerted rising of a party aiming at important changes in the Government.

He was told that there was no sign of such things: the conspiracy, if it had envisaged such things, had collapsed at the sound of its own pistol-shot. No one knew who had fired, nor who had prompted him to fire. But the wounded King, looking forward to a long convalescence, had immediately summoned his brother with a view to concerting arrangements for the immediate future.

There was nothing for it except to send the messenger away, to change clothes rapidly and hasten towards the Palace, the great bedchamber where his brother lay. Rumour should never say that he had been slow or reluctant to bow to a stricken King's behests. He would be all attention, all obedience. He would be quite sincere: if a vague and purple dream was rapidly vanishing from his mind, a very definite sense of horror, of having escaped by miracle from a soul-destroying entanglement, was speeding his steps and lightening his overburdened mind.

It was unfortunate for him that Rumour—in the form of a cross-eyed man who had hammered his way into a brandy-shop—was already asking how the devil Duke Carl came to be toggged up like that at an hour when Dukes (and brandy-shop proprietors) generally prefer to be asleep.

Twenty years later, at the time of Axel von Fersen's death, there was another and equally difficult question asked about His Majesty King Carl XIII. Another hundred and thirty have now passed, but those who concern themselves with such matters are still unable to decide between the several possible answers.

IT WAS MARCH, AND THE WORLD AT LARGE seemed mad. The world at large had not yet heard of the maniac's pistol-shot, nor of Gustav's folly in dancing so close to death; but there were other stupidities to keep its tongue busy. Madame De La Motte had escaped from her richly-deserved prison, had crossed to England, and was spewing forth vile pamphlets to blacken the reputation she had already ruined in her lust for diamonds, and the money for which diamonds could be exchanged. The world holds it sane to prefer money to honour or even decency, and she was paid for her pamphlets. But King Louis was surely mad in thinking he could silence her by buying up the pamphlets, employing good M. De La Porte to purchase and smother the whole edition. M. De La Porte got the stuff to Paris, stacked it in the back room of his lodging. The Assembly ordered his arrest on suspicion, ordered the searching of his rooms. Marie-Antoinette, whose follies were of another order, had protested against the business from the first. She got the pamphlets safely to Sèvres, before the Assembly's commissioners could nose them out. They were burnt at Sèvres, thrown, booklet by booklet, into the furnaces of the porcelain factory. And those who were in charge of the business were mad enough to think that the workmen who were kept idle through the tedious process, forbidden to touch or look at the mountain of print that awaited destruction, would not have the curiosity to touch and look and read.

Gouverneur Morris, sanest of mortals, had also gone to London. He was watching the inspired madman, Philidor, play three games of chess at once, with eyes blindfolded. When news came of Anckarström's pistol-shot, neither London nor Gouverneur Morris could see its full significance. They betted on the King's chances of surviving his injury, they swore (though level-headed Morris would not join them in their oaths) that it was just part of the mad Jacobin plot to upset everything. The news came to Paris, and reached Marie-

Antoinette. She would hold no wager, entertain no doubt of his death. "I used to hate him," she said, "and everything he did must prosper. I grew to love him, and he is sure to die. I bring a curse on everyone I love."

The Assembly demanded the King's approval on new laws, condemning to death or exile such priests as would not accept their new and handcuffed Church or take the oath to Mammon which the Pope had already forbidden them to swear. They thought that no one in his senses could use the hated Veto against such reasonable, such obviously necessary measures. He used the Veto, thinking the Assembly moonstruck to imagine that the temporary approval of Paris could mean more to him than his guardianship of the Faith.

All Europe grew feverish with the manias that lead to the supreme lunacy of war. The Powers preached a Crusade against the Revolution, wondering what spoil Crusaders might manage to annex. The Assembly, with no troops, no money and no allies, madly anticipated them with demands that breathed Defiance, and suggested Ultimatum. The Princes, Provence and D'Artois, living in an unreal world, with their hordes of flattering *émigrés* at Koblenz, talked wildly of entering Paris in a month, at the head of the conquering armies. Destiny smiled sourly, knowing the Powers, knowing that *émigré* Princes enter in undignified style, with the camp-followers and the baggage, and only when their allies and masters have settled how best to distribute the loot. So much was Common Sense, and only idiots could ignore it; but Destiny also knew that Provence and D'Artois, in spite of every probability, would have twenty years to wait before they could see Paris, even from a baggage-waggon.

As March—month of Madness and month of the War God—dragged out its thirty-one days, Prussia and Russia were busy towards the East. They had partitioned Poland again, leaving little undevoured. Its rich fields, its recruiting-grounds and serf-markets, the commerce of Dantzic and Cracow, fell one by one into the greedy hands of Moscow and Berlin. And Berlin was mad enough to think that fools might believe its manifestos, announcing that its sole motive was to crush the dangerous democracy, the latent Jacobinism of the Poles; but

even fools were not so easily persuaded that Berlin was saving Europe from downtrodden peasants who had never heard of Democracy and happy-go-lucky aristocrats who detested its very name.

FERSEN HAD GONE TO KOBLENTZ. He had ventured into that swarming hive of *ci-devants*, tentative hangers-on and unblushing beggars, by whose help Provence and D'Artois imagined themselves leaders of a powerful army, a grand moral force. If war must come, it should surely be a reasonable war, with some better aim than vengeance and the attempt to re-establish what had been destroyed for ever. Fersen knew what was in King Louis' mind, whether it had grown there of itself or been planted by his wife. He knew something of the temper of France, however restless her revolutionary ardour. He knew that the Princes knew little of either, and, to judge by their actions, cared even less.

They received him politely enough, if somewhat patronisingly, in the huge Palace which an obsequious German Elector had put at their disposal. They were in Council, with all the paraphernalia of a Royalty that was not yet theirs. Provence was suave and stolid, D'Artois marched up and down the room like a spoilt child, listening to nothing but his own voice. And his own voice cried war.

Fersen controlled himself with an effort. "Messieurs," he said, "I am with you in thinking that war may be inevitable. But I am come to ask you to embark on it, or watch the Powers embark on it, with some consideration for the prisoners, the hostages that your enemy holds. The Jacobins have no army to speak of. You are probably right in thinking that the campaign will be swift and decisive. But can you not give a thought for the opinions of your King, even for his safety? He has asked for a European Congress, backed, if you will, by armies. But if you help to loose those armies without the Congress, you are asking the Jacobins to turn and rend their defenceless victims—a man, a woman and a child—who can be killed in even shorter time than it would take a regiment of Austrian hussars to gallop unopposed to Paris."

D'Artois stopped in his mincing walk: Provence looked smugly at his own sleek hands, clasped over the documents on the table. There was silence for a moment and the two Princes seemed to understand each other.

"You speak of our brother as King," said Provence quietly. "But you must remember he is only so in a limited sense. He is limited by this ridiculous Assembly, by the mob that is hired to applaud whatever follies the Assembly may vote, by the very painful situation he has himself created in calling a States-General and allowing it to usurp the Royal power. He is even limited, as you yourself suggest, by the fear of violent death. My brother is no coward, but he is . . . what was your word? . . . hostage. And the value of a hostage is that he or she can be kept under the permanent threat of execution."

He was picking his words carefully. He had not forgotten his literary reputation, his pride in the neatly turned phrase. D'Artois was more headlong. "War!" he said vehemently, rising on the toes of his dancing pumps. "We have threatened War long enough: now we must wage it. We must tell these scoundrels that they will be annihilated unless they submit. That they will be automatically condemned as criminals if they attempt to defend themselves against our armies . . . I think I can speak of the Austrian and Prussian troops as ours. We are united in the one sacred Cause. Congresses are nonsense. Louis' opinions are negligible. The only thing that matters is guns and more guns. It's no good arguing with scum. You must cow them. A good King is one who knows when the best moment has arrived for cowing scum. I have only got to look at the calendar. March, 1792. Now!"

He had walked to a mirror. He was patting back his hair, arranging his mean little face into a caricature of bellicose Royalty. He was soon satisfied with the result, and turned back to encounter Fersen's grave grey eyes with undaunted vanity. "I hope you will dine with us," he said, "before you go back to Brussels. The Elector has promised us a special entertainment to-night . . . some musicians from Saxony. Even in time of war, even in exile, a King must remember to encourage the arts."

Fersen sat still, wondering why he had ever left Brussels.

It would have been better to stay where he could talk to Mercy D'Argenteau, assist that wide-awake old gentleman to frame such letters to Vienna as would help the young Emperor to retain his sanity in a world of lunatics.

M. De Provence seemed to feel the atmosphere of dissatisfaction that emanated from his silent guest.

"Count Fersen," he said, "I know that you are in touch with my brother in Paris, as well as with my sister-in-law. You are tolerably in touch with the distressing events in our poor deluded country. But we in Koblenz have some notion what is happening, and we have the added advantage of holding fast to Principle, undisturbed by threats of mob violence. Your personal feelings. . . . Oh, they do you credit, Count Fersen, they do you great credit! . . . your personal feelings are naturally engaged for my poor brother, and his wife. But you must not forget that the fate of two individuals—three, if we remember His Highness the Dauphin—must not weigh with us for an instant, when set beside the future of a Principle, especially such a Principle as that of Monarchy. It is the fate of Kings to perish like other mortals. It is the fate, I may say the duty, of Dynasties to survive. If all three of the individuals I mentioned were to meet with misfortune——"

Fersen could stand no more. He rose suddenly from his chair, startling Provence from the contemplation of his well-kept hands, D'Artois from the dancing-step he had begun to execute on the highly-polished floor.

"If they were to meet with misfortune," he said with subdued emphasis, "Messieurs the Regents, Messieurs the Princes, would inherit the Kingship they already seem to be exercising from Koblenz. King Louis the XVIIth, or (if we remember His Highness the Dauphin, and the fact that he may survive his father for a month or two) King Louis the XVIIIth will be King of a France in which a double regicide has been committed. And when he perishes like other mortals, King Charles the Xth will no doubt reign in his stead."

They gaped at him, hardly believing their own ears. *Émigrés*, dependent on their leaders for bare subsistence, are not given to plain speaking, and they were long accustomed to the *émigré* whine. Fersen had time to reach the door, to turn back

with an almost exaggerated bow to usurping Royalty. "I am sorry to miss the Saxon musicians," he said. "This country is unimpeachable for music, whatever strange politics it may breed. But I fear I must be riding for Brussels before dark."

There was a long silence after he had left, an almost painful pause before D'Artois restarted his gyrations or conviction returned into the sleek smile of Provence. From some distant corner of the Palace came the sound of violin and spinet, the tuning-up of instruments unrivalled in Europe.

"Well," said Provence at last, "it was he that said it—not us. A curious person. But that woman always had strange tastes."

THERE WAS NOT MUCH DOUBT OF WAR when Fersen reached Brussels. There were whitecoats marching in a business-like manner through the streets: there were Austrian officers at every *salon*, trying to conceal their bewilderment at a war which would find them fighting side by side with Prussia. They only supposed that things would end as they should, leaving Austria with a fair share of the plunder, instead of the insulting flattery which was all she had gained when Poland was partitioned behind her back. Not that the partitioning of France should involve much fighting. France would be frightened into submission by a mere proclamation. Fersen wondered if he were losing his judgment, or merely learning Common Sense, when he found himself gradually agreeing with the general verdict. He even began to hope that the Austrians, the *émigrés* of Brussels (more sober than their counterparts of Koblenz), were justified in their opinion that France would not dare to harm her King or Queen for fear of the vengeance threatened by proclamation.

It was stern enough when it was published, and Marie-Antoinette had approved of its sternness, by secret letter from her prison in the Tuileries. Fersen fell into line, ratified, with unnecessary emphasis, the verdict of Brussels and Koblenz. Count Merci D'Argenteau pursed ambiguous lips; he had long ago learnt that when no one will listen, it is a diplomatist's business not to speak. It was a pity that M. Gouverneur Morris was in London, watching Philidor play chess. It was a

pity that his astringent American wit was not at the service of the French Queen or her Swedish lover. He read the manifesto carefully and summed it up, in two sentences, to an unappreciative audience in a London club. "Be all against us," he said, "for we are against you all. Make a good resistance, for there is no longer any hope." M. Gouverneur Morris was a lover of the French people and he did not believe that they were as easily cowed as their enemies and their would-be masters imagined.

COUNT MERCI D'ARGENTEAU'S lips were still pursed when he received Fersen on the last day of that fateful month. But his eyes were graver now, his brow more deeply furrowed. He was reaching that time of life when personal friendships, long-standing affections, seem more important than the fate of empires.

"If you have come for my news from France," he said, "it is for once more important than yours—even though it reached me directly from the Queen. I have known Marie-Antoinette since she was a child. I think I can claim to understand her, so far as anyone can understand a woman. It is obvious why she hates the Revolution; I should despise her if she did not. It is excusable in her if she finds the French nation hard to love, considering their treatment of their Queen—but I wish it did not provoke her to such extremes as that of betraying their military plans to the enemy . . ."

"You are being very tortuous," said Fersen, "even for a diplomat . . . or is it a retired diplomat? May I ask to what you are referring?"

"I can best tell you——" began the old man, and then stopped abruptly. ". . . May I read you her letter?" he said. "Or rather, since I have taken the elementary precaution of burning it, may I read you what I am sending on to Vienna? I am technically retired, as you hint, but I fear it is my duty, as an Austrian subject in time of war, to take advantage of the follies of the French Queen. Listen to this."

He paused, took out a letter he had already put into its envelope, and unfolded it before him.

"'I have the honour to report,' " he read, "'that I have received a cypher letter from the Queen, dated the twenty-sixth of March. She informs me that M. Dumouriez'—that's the latest Republican General, God help the Republic!—'that M. Dumouriez has taken the movements of our troops to imply an agreement between the Powers to make war on France. He has decided to anticipate matters. His plan is to make two attacks, one upon Savoy, the other in the directions of Liége. This second attack is to be led by M. De La Fayette. That was the decision taken yesterday in Council . . .'"

Count Merci looked up from the paper, as if expecting more astonishment than he actually met in Fersen's eyes.

"She is vague," he said, "as all women are in military matters. But I think the intention is clear enough. A decision is taken in France's secret council. Within four days it is in the hands of the enemies of France."

Fersen shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Well, you've burnt the original," he said, "though I suppose there will be others, to other people . . . not so prompt to burn. All the same, I would like to take exception to a word you are using. You've no business to say 'France' when you mean 'The Revolution'."

"You can choose for yourself," said Merci D'Argenteau, "which you consider the more dangerous. I am quite sure of one thing: on March the twenty-sixth, 1792, Queen Marie-Antoinette signed her own death-warrant."

VI

IT WAS COLD, INDESCRIBABLY COLD, in the Upper Dining Hall, when Prince Carl reached the Palace where his brother lay wounded. The room was in desolate confusion: the litter on which the King had been carried home lay overturned in a corner, with dark stains upon its dishevelled rugs. Candles sprouted from dining-tables and mantelpiece, from chair and bench and floor. In the cross-light of their flames, the dozen inhabitants of the room walked up and down in agitation, whispered in corners, or huddled round the hurriedly-started fire in the stove. It was half-past two in the morning, but no one had any thought of sleep.

Duke Carl paced down the room, signalling to the Guards that stood by the far door. They had their orders and passed him through at once. He stepped into his brother's bed-chamber, into the presence of the King.

The room seemed twilit: one night-lamp glimmered by the tall and ghostly curtains of the bed's canopy. As the attendants moved about the small islet of light, lapped by seas of gloom, their shadows flitted fantastically across the moulded ceiling. The cold was even crueller here than in the hall behind: as one entered, it seemed to strike at the heart. The patient on the Royal bed was no longer in stout Doctor Hallman's hands. He would not let them call Dalberg, perhaps the cleverest doctor in Stockholm, but a spiteful and malicious man. Except for Dalberg, he had the foremost physicians to care for him, the most trusted Science of the day. And the most trusted Science of the day decreed that a wounded man should lie abed or sit on his chair, in a room where no artificial heat must temper the savagery of a Swedish March, no glimmer of fire be permitted in the tall white porcelain stove.

He lay bravely smiling up at Armfelt. A secretary, pen in hand, sat waiting for his dictation of further orders to keep his kingdom safe. Duke Carl saw all three look up as he approached the light. If he had ever wished Gustav ill, ever hankered for

his power, grudge and ambition withered at the friendship and welcome which beamed through his sick brother's face. "So you have come," said Gustav. "I was just making out a rescript appointing you Regent. As I've been telling Mauritz here, it may be nothing serious, but the doctors tell me I've got to be tied up for weeks, perhaps for months. You and Mauritz and Evert Taube must look after things till I get better." His eyes closed a moment, as though he were trying to recover strength. "I shall sit up a little now," he said. "We must get the business done. And the pain's worse when I stay long in one position."

The attendants helped him to his chair. The business was tedious, but he showed no sign of flagging. Only when the question of his murderers was discussed did his strength seem to desert him. "I can't believe it was Anckerström," he said. ". . . That wonderful face! I signed a pardon for him, you know, only a year or so back. Are his accomplices known?"

"No, Your Majesty," said the secretary. "Herr Liljensparre suspects a great number of other men, but he has no definite evidence."

"So much the better," said the King. "I don't want to know their names. I will not be told who else was in the plot."

"They'll be punished without Your Majesty knowing," said Duke Carl. "The first business of the Regency will be to track them down and put them to death."

"No, no!" answered the King. "I'll have no one put to death! If it was Anckerström that actually tried to murder me, I suppose he must suffer. But none of the others! Is that clear?" Again he closed his eyes: a spasm of pain seemed to rack him for a moment, and there was silence in the room save for the King's heavy breathing, the cheerful ticking of his little clock. "Not even their names," he said at last. "I'd rather not hear." Then suddenly he opened his eyes, and there was a faint reflection of mischief in their depths. "But I'd like to know," he said quietly, "what their plans were, what they thought they were going to do with Sweden when they had got rid of me. That *would* be interesting! . . . But now, just for a little, I think I should try to sleep."

The attendants helped him back to bed. Two of them had to hold him half upright in bed, easing his pain by making a living pillow of their arms. Others, off duty for a while, crept behind screens or into corners, to wrap themselves in fur rugs and snatch a little slumber in spite of chattering teeth. The little clock ticked on, hanging in the lamp-light on a Grecian pillar at the bed's foot. But the King stirred again and again to ask what o'clock it was, how much longer it would be before the short day dawned.

LILJENSPARRE HAD A REPORT to make to Duke Carl in the now tidied Dining Hall. He had little news yet of the conspirators' plans. But their probable names, their quality, had leaked out, and there was considerable fear of a rising. The poor people, the shopkeepers and merchants, were banding together to attack noblemen's houses and avenge the horrible attempt upon King Gustav's life. Clas Horn was in prison: his father, utterly ignorant of his son's plot, had to be taken as prisoner to the Palace: it needed a squadron of dragoons to prevent the furious mob from tearing him to pieces amid the ruins of his fine Stockholm house. Bjelke had escaped from the Opera House and avoided Liljensparre's cross-examination: he could not face it now, and had sought sure refuge in a phial of poison.

The doctors, too, must be heard. They refused to commit themselves, were uncertain about death or life. They had extracted nails and slugs from the wound; there were still two bullets lodged where no skill could remove them: but men had lived long years with lead in them, even such lead as Anckarström's tortured mind could prompt him to cram into his hideous weapon. Mauritz Armfelt had been holding the King's hand while the doctors were probing and turning the lacerated flesh. "He's not brave," he said, "not by nature. He feels pain more than most, more than you or I. But if you had seen him while these fellows did their work! My God, if he dies now, Sweden will have lost more than a king. She will have lost a man!"

There was another to show bravery, though of a strange

sort. Morning brought young Pontus to the Palace, sweetly condolent, his girlish eyes tender with compassion at King Gustav's injury. He did not know that Liljensparre was already on his track, had already traced a somewhat insolent pencil note to young Pontus. But it had been a warning of sorts, sign of last-minute repentance. Young Pontus owed his life to it, and to the King's clemency, though no man could tell what kind of life a man can lead in exile, having done what he had done. "You know," whispered Gustav, when he had unwillingly heard the name, "you know that Pontus was living on what I gave him from my private purse?"

The days went by. Secretary Schröderheim sat by the bedside writing, writing, as the King dictated. The thousand threads must be gathered up somehow, tied in some kind of knot. King Gustav spoke cheerfully, planned excursions for his convalescence, took hearty meals and talked incessantly as he ate and drank. But at night he lay asking for the time beneath that ever-ticking clock. But he knew now, watching the shadows dance upon his ceiling, that if he escaped death it would be by some kind of miracle. He was used to miracles, having worked many in his life: but he knew that a time must come for Reality to conquer the strongest Imagination, for the cold tenacity of Fact to put to flight a thousand squadrons of Fancy, victorious through forty years of splendour and success.

He was a good patient, an amazing one so far as courage was concerned. Only when his wound began to gangrene, and the stench of it to assail him at every hour, he must have perfume poured on himself and his bed in frequent and copious libations. Only when the cold grew unbearable he must call Schröderheim to him and whisper that if he did die, it would be of pleurisy or pneumonia, hardly hastened by the assassin's pistol.

He was still insistent for mercy, for oblivion upon his murderers' names. When Duke Carl came again, he grew feverish in his instruction that his little son must never hear them. "If he is to rule Sweden, if he is to be Gustav IV," he said, "he must not have hatred and vengeance planted in his mind before he grows to manhood."

Now that he had spoken so, they could ask him if he would see the Archbishop. No one knew, perhaps he did not know himself, how far he believed in God, how far he expected anything beyond the cloudy curtains that he might soon be parting to step beyond man's ken. He had dabbled in so many mysticisms, been misled by so many fake prophets and charlatans, especially in his youth. He had been a child of his age, resentful of ancient restraints, quick to welcome untried dogmas that had nothing but their newness to recommend them. He was a little humbler than most of his like, far humbler now that he might be dying. For all that, he would not see the Archbishop. "I want a friend," he said. "Send for Wallquist. I'll take Communion from Wallquist." And Wallquist, Bishop of Växjö, spokesman for monarchy in the Riksdag, the brave and tender, the eloquent and shrewd, came to bow his lionlike head at the bedside, and listen to King Gustav's whispered confession of faults that no brilliance could quite excuse.

HE HAD HARDLY LEFT THE KING, he had hardly stepped back into the Great Dining Hall, when his eye fell on an unexpected, an almost unwelcome figure: it brought with it memories of bitter opposition in the Riksdag or at the Council Board, of missiles forged against the King's friends, and nets spread for their feet. Grey and grave of face, newly ridden in from his country home, Count Fredrik Fersen awaited an audience with his King.

He stood apart from the crowd of loiterers and servants, and near the Bishop's path. He bowed courteously, saying nothing. It was the Bishop who spoke, and in words from which he could not succeed in expelling all enmity.

"I am glad to see your lordship here," he said. "Though I can hardly hope that you are come to acknowledge error."

Count Fredrik seemed untouched, though his figure stiffened a little. "Your Grace is wise," he answered, "not to cherish such hopes. I have committed no error of which any man need feel ashamed. If murderers——" he checked his rising tones, looked round the room, and recovered an easier courtesy.

"No," he said. "This is no place for bickering. Will His Majesty receive me now?"

He waved his stick to the attendant at the door, and the man vanished silently into the bedroom.

"I had no wish to bicker," said Wallquist more softly, "and I was very far from accusing you of complicity in murder. I know Count Fersen better. But your whole life, my lord, your whole work . . ." He broke off, waving his white, strong hand in a gesture of dismissal.

"My whole life," said the Count with dignity, "was given—as I believe yours has been—to upholding what I thought to be just, what I thought would benefit my country, and fighting against innovations which I still consider as milestones on her road to ruin." He paused; his eyes searched Wallquist as if demanding agreement. "Your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor your ways mine," he continued, deep sincerity fighting the flavour of Riksdag manner that crept into his voice. "Our plans for Sweden's future mean nothing to each other—or worse than nothing. I and my friends fought for ancient custom, for law and privilege, and for such powers that the King himself had left us. When he destroyed our mastery, he promised us certain things—the power over the purse, the 'yes' or 'no' to war and peace, the freedom from arrest for what we might say in Council. If he thought himself compelled to break those promises, we were no less compelled to claim them, to fight him for them by every means in our power."

Wallquist was silent a moment. He darted a glance of friendship at the Count, but could see no response in the old man's face. Behind him, out of earshot, Badin was piling new logs into the now blazing stove: the flames bathed the blackamoor's face in redness, shone brightly on his gleaming teeth. The Bishop knew that he could not stay long in this place to answer Count Fersen, but he was unwilling to go without one further word.

"You are right," he answered at last, "in saying that your thoughts are not mine. I can hardly come to grips with them, we live in such differing worlds. We cannot tell how posterity will judge King Gustav, but I cannot believe that it will do so by such scrupulous, such legalist standards as yours. You

speak of money raised without your concurrence; I can only answer that I believe most of it to have been sorely needed and wisely spent. You speak of war declared against the Constitution. It was the first war Sweden has waged, for a century and more, that did not end in her losing some province, some precious fragment of her ancient heritage.*

He paused, and made a step or two, as if to pass on. Count Fersen gave no sign of moving, or of lifting his head to answer. The Bishop put up a hesitating hand and laid it on his opponent's shoulder.

"When I was a curate at Klara," he said, "when I was an unknown pastor in a Smaland village, my country was almost unknown in the family of Europe. We had a past, and a glorious one; but our present was to be obscure and despised, enslaved to Russian gold and to our own fear of the Russian armies and fleets. We have fought Russia, and Sweden is now respected and renowned. War is a terrible evil, as every Christian must witness; but it can break through certain webs of filth that no peaceful broom could sweep away."

Count Fersen might have answered now, but that the servant had returned and was ushering him into the bed-chamber. He raised his eyes, took Wallquist's hand from his shoulder and clasped it with momentary pressure. "To quote your lordship," he said with a friendly smile, "we live in different worlds." The next moment he had bowed and passed into the bedroom.

A grey light filtered in from the frost-bound panes of the windows; but the lamp still burned, still feebly lit a little enclosure of screens that stood lonely in the middle of the huge room. King Gustav had told his servants to lift him out, since he was past any walking now. He must sit in a chair to receive his ancient enemy.

He was smiling, but Count Fersen did not see the smile. He stood with his eyes upon the smoothly polished floor, now scratched and neglected in this house of impending doom.

* It is a good rule to avoid footnotes in a novel, but an acknowledgment to Royalty may perhaps justify an exception to that rule. The observation here attributed to Bishop Wallquist, on the subject of the Russian War of 1788-90, was first put into print—in an English magazine—by His present Majesty, King Gustav V of Sweden.

"Your Majesty——" he said, and could get no further. The skirmish with Wallquist seemed to have overlaid the purpose for which he had come.

"If I may ask Your Majesty's pardon," he said at last, in stiff tones, "if I may ask Your Majesty to forget certain things that have passed between us—certain things that I—that Your Majesty perhaps forced upon me. Your Majesty knows that my life has been guided by principles—principles by which Your Majesty sets little store—but precious to me, handed down from honourable ancestors. If at any time I have gone too far in my devotion to them, Your Majesty will understand that now . . . now . . ." Again he checked. There was a suspicion of a tear behind the cold and formal words.

He looked up. Gustav was still smiling, and there was a light in his face that does not visit the faces of men until the end draws near. Slowly he raised his hand—the Royal hand extended for a subject to kiss. The old man hesitated, grasped it tenderly and was suddenly on his knees before the King, sobbing hot tears as if his heart would break. "If I had only known, sir——" he began. "If I had thought for a moment what those men—— At my own table, eating my bread and salt! Thank God, they left me, they saw that I would never have followed them down the . . . the path that leads to . . . that leads to this!"

King Gustav waited. He was learning patience now. He let the tears subside, the old man's pride begin to win him back. Then he gently withdrew his hand.

"You must not kneel," he said. "You must embrace me. Everything is forgotten that you would like me to forget." He was still King, could still command obedience. Count Fersen rose, and the two men, sundered by every earthly barrier, were locked for an instant in the clasp of friendship.

Gustav lay back in his chair, a quiet happiness on every feature. "They tried to murder me," he said. "It may prove that they have succeeded. But meanwhile I must bless them for having reconciled me to the many old friends with whom I have been so long at odds."

IT WAS FRIDAY NIGHT WHEN ANCKARSTRÖM pulled the trigger. Gustav was still alive the next Friday, still making cheerful plans for his convalescence, for expeditions and country holidays, when spring should dawn at last.

Sunday came, and he seemed better still. He sat joking with Schröderheim, he ate and talked more than ever. But that evening he began to cough as he had not coughed before. He took to bed and could not leave it for his chair. He lay sleepless by night, still hearing the little clock tick over him, still asking, through his fever, what hour of the night it was.

It was twelve days after the masked ball that he began to die. At times he would send everyone away, and, when he thought himself alone, find relief in desperate groans: but he still kept a cheerful face for those he summoned to his bedside. If he talked less, he was still eager for others to talk round him, so long as they could find anything to discuss. Mauritz Armfelt and Schröderheim, barked for a topic, ventured once or twice on religion. He lay listening, with wide eyes interested and perhaps amused: he had always had an open mind, refusing the great venture of belief: but he would soon know, leaving them still to guess.

He called for Duke Carl again, again insisted on pardon for his own murderers. "As your King I command clemency," he said, "as your brother I beseech you. If you disobey me, you must answer for it before God." It was left at this—that Anckarström must suffer, while the rest went free into exile.

He seemed a little better for his success in this matter. He sent Armfelt to bed. He had ceased to cough, and there was hope of a quiet night.

They roused Armfelt at half-past four. They brought him hurrying to the bedside. Gustav stretched out a feeble hand to his friend. "Not long now," he said. "Don't forget your friend when he's gone."

They had summoned Dr. Dalberg at last, King Gustav consenting. It was too late for Dalberg to give more than a momentary relief.

"How many hours?" asked Gustav, and was answered five or

six. "Half-past eleven," he whispered. "Call Schröderheim. Everything must be in order. And not too many people here. When my father died, the room was like a market-place."

He dictated his will and his last instructions, while Armfelt and Evert Taube watched. He had barely time, for Schröderheim, half-crazy with grief, upset the inkpot across the papers and had to start all over again. When all was done, Bishop Wallquist was summoned for the last time. Then, ceremonies over, he said his good-bye, his grateful thanks to all; hardly a friend, hardly a Palace servant was forgotten. Armfelt asked whether he would like to see his Queen once more, or even his little son.

"No, not now," said Gustav. "I feel sleepy. Rest may do me good."

Then he fell quietly asleep, and did not wake again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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THE DOCTOR WAS TAKING A DAY'S OUTING. He had locked up his house at the corner of the *Rue de la Sourdière*, and had driven out of Paris by the great south road; it was Sunday, and such patients as called could just go away again, and come back on Monday morning. He was a member of the National Assembly and punctilious in his attendances; but for once the National Assembly would have to debate without his help.

It owed him a holiday. It was he who had made its interminable sessions possible, bearable even. They had been quite unbearable until he had insisted on more elbow-room for the members, proper backs to their seats; fourteen hours of upright weight on the posterior, with no change to lean back, can exhaust the most fervent idealism. He had also had a couple of stoves installed to warm the Riding-school that had been converted into their Parliament House. It was July now, and there was no need for stoves, but they would be grateful to the doctor when winter came again.

He had driven out in his own little *calèche* three-quarters of the way to Fontainebleau. It had been hot and dusty on the road, but the miles of green tree and green field on each side were a very welcome change from the towering houses which turned most Paris streets into sunless canyons, swarming with man and the refuse of man. The doctor prided himself on being a philanthropist, on working for the comfort and well-being of his fellow-creatures in more practical ways than by haggling over the new Constitution of France, or framing defiant messages to the rest of Europe. But it was good to get away from the piled housefuls of them sometimes, to spin past woods and cornfields, past the pigs and hens in the roadside farms, past the few churchgoers who still thought that Sunday was not Sunday without a Mass. It was good to stable at the little inn at Ponthierry, order dinner in an hour's time, and stroll down to the banks of the river while they were getting it ready.

It seemed wonderfully cool and fresh in the meadows on each side of the path. The doctor was not a man to leave a perfectly good path where he could find one, and soil his neatly-waxed shoes with dampness or hay-seed. But he liked the feel of the greenness on each side of him, the fresh breeze that reached him from the Seine. He even took off his hat and let the cool air play upon his brow. He never took off his hat in Paris; he was nearing fifty, and had learnt to accept the conventions of society in all places where society congregated. But he found life unusually pleasant as he reached an apparently lonely spot on the river-bank, and stood looking out across the swirling waters. He could not help feeling a faint irritation at the discovery that he was not, after all, alone. An unshaven man in dirty blue trousers was lying in a bed of reeds a few yards away, under the shadow of overhanging ash-trees.

He seemed to be sleeping, but appearances are proverbially deceptive; his eyes were hardly open, but he had evidently seen the hatless but dapper figure in the sunlight. "Good day, Citizen Doctor," he said.

The doctor managed to smile in a friendly, if slightly patronising way. "Good day," he answered, and would have liked to add: "My good man," or some such vocative from a past that the Revolution was rapidly sweeping away. "I am surprised you know me," he went on. "I am afraid I have not the pleasure . . ."

"No. You may have one day!" was the rather unexpected reply from the unshaven lips. "And I can't claim the honour of knowing you . . . at least, only as well as I know your six hundred colleagues."

"Oh, I see," answered the doctor, replacing his hat on his head. "A student of politics?"

There was no temptation to be patronising now. The man, whatever his appearance, spoke with the accents of the educated, the unconscious self-assertion of the well-born.

"I've studied them since I was no taller than your walking-stick," he said. "They're the only thing that's worth studying. All the other things that people turn into mysteries are quite simple at bottom. It's a question of how they're governed . . .

or rather, how they're fed, which is the same thing. When Government puts enough bread, and the same bread, into everyone's mouth, then there'll be nothing more to worry over. I grant you it's not an easy problem, but once it's solved it'll put an end to all the other problems . . . and about time too! God, doesn't it make you sick sometimes, the way your friends talk in that damned Riding-school about Liberty, Equality and Fraternity? Why can't they make laws to enforce Equality, real Equality? The same wages for everyone, the same work and the same leisure?"

The doctor fidgeted uncomfortably on the path. Granted that the man had once been his social equal, possibly even his superior, one could not feel quite happy, now that he had come down in the world, at being used as a pupil for an apparently self-opinionated lecture.

The man was sitting up now, chewing viciously at a twig he had picked out of the grass. One could see that he was tall. The doctor, running an observant eye over him again, over the beaked nose and deep-set eyes, could not help wondering whether he had not come across their owner before.

"Well!" said the doctor almost shyly, "and you believe in Equality? It doesn't strike you, does it, that Equality and Fraternity are rather more difficult to combine than might at first sight appear? I can feel most fraternal to my neighbour when he is, socially speaking, beneath me, and in need of my help, or when he is above me, and commanding my respect by his use of the gifts of fortune. But when he is my exact equal, he becomes my rival, my potential enemy. I cannot always afford to think of him or treat him with brotherly generosity."

The blue-trousered one gazed steadily across the water. It was obvious that, like most lecturers, he was uninterested in the discourses of others, seldom considered them worth even the courtesy of listening.

"Equality," he said dreamily. "Would it interest you, Doctor, to know that I was born a Marquis . . . and that my family took its name from a Saint—a damned mouldy old statue in a damned mouldy old church? Saint Simon, that's what I used to call myself. The Marquis De St. Simon. And now I've changed my name to Citizen Jean Bon, and I'm a

great deal prouder of it than I used to be of being descended from some bastard of Charlemagne's!"

"You may alter your mind yet," answered the doctor, concealing his surprise. "I've noticed that young men often recapture their pride in their families as they grow older, and watch the years—and the generations—slide past." He had taken off his hat again and was fanning himself with it. The shade looked inviting, and it was foolish to be deterred from moving into it by the proximity which had seemed embarrassing but had now become intriguing: it was not every day that one met a Marquis in workman's trousers. The doctor picked his way carefully towards him and felt a distinct relief at escaping from the sun. The movement enabled him to see that the unshaven face was not so young as he had imagined, not so young as its owner's words and opinions had led him to believe. "It is certainly interesting," he said, "to find a whole-hearted believer in Equality. I have to vote for it in the Assembly, but I cannot persuade myself into any enthusiasm for its establishment in this very imperfect world."

"The Assembly would kill any enthusiasm!" said St. Simon sharply. "They can't see what's under their noses in that place. If only I could make some of them read the book I'm writing now. If only they'd let me prove to them that until they set to work and redistribute property . . ."

He broke off suddenly. The doctor had obviously ceased to listen; his shapely old ear was cocked westward, towards the road from which he had strolled twenty minutes ago. "What on earth is that noise?" he said.

St. Simon turned an impatient head. "Just someone singing," he said. "People singing on the road. Soldiers, I expect. What a filthy kind of tune!"

"I was just thinking it was rather a fine one," said the doctor. His stick was already beginning to beat time to the strange music. "I think you're right: soldiers. Yes, it's certainly a march."

"It's certainly a mess!" answered St. Simon. "It's not music at all . . . not what I was brought up to call music!"

The doctor's stick had evidently caught the infection of the rhythm badly: it was jiggling in his hand like a conductor's

baton. "May I remind you," he said, "that you were brought up as a Marquis, with all the tastes and opinions of the old regime? You seem to have shed the opinions pretty thoroughly, but tastes, mere matters of fancy, are sometimes more deep-seated than the judgment—and harder to change with a changing epoch. I had not your advantages, or disadvantages: I was brought up *Bon Bourgeois*, and I find this tune rather inspiring."

As he spoke, the music died abruptly. The singers, whoever they were, seemed to have stopped at the Ponthierry inn. "Excuse my inattention," said the doctor politely. "And, by the way, what would you call these opinions of yours about—what was it?—the redistribution of property? If you want to succeed with them you must invent a good name. They're not Republicanism. They're not exactly Equalitarianism, and anyway that's a hopelessly clumsy label; even the Assembly couldn't swallow it, and goodness knows it's not frightened of long words. You must really give the matter your consideration. . . . Shall we be strolling back towards the road? May I perhaps ask the pleasure of your company at dinner?"

St. Simon rose to the extent of his considerable height. He towered over the doctor. For a moment he seemed to resent the invitation to dine at the expense of a *Bon Bourgeois*. Then he remembered he was Jean Bon and no longer a Marquis.

"As you will," he said, and began to lead the way along the path with long strides which made it rather difficult for the doctor to keep up with him.

They walked a hundred yards in silence before St. Simon spoke. When he did, it was obvious that he had this time listened rather more attentively to his companion's words.

"About the music," he said, "I simply don't know what you mean. A nasty noise is a nasty noise, whether one is born Marquis or chimney-sweeper. About my system, I've invented my label for it already. It's the only hope for Society and I've called it 'Socialism'. And it *is* Equalitarian. I believe in every sort of equality; that's bound to come, once we have Equality in Property, Equality in wages and Equality in work, Equality in life and Equality in death. If only. . . . Why, whatever's the matter?"

The little doctor had stopped short, abandoning any attempt to keep pace with St. Simon's long legs. He stood as if transfixed by his tall companion's words. But a moment later he had recovered himself and was trotting up abreast.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I hope I'm not superstitious, but something you said seemed to chime in so strangely with what I've been thinking lately . . . quite a small matter, I suppose you'd consider it. Only I can't help it weighing on my mind."

"You don't mean—'Equality in death'?" asked St. Simon, retarding his pace to suit the doctor's. "That was just a phrase, and a silly one: the sort of thing that windbag Robespierre rolls out in your Assembly."

"It's exactly what I do mean," answered the doctor. "It just touched a chord in my mind—rather a sensitive one at the moment. But if you'd seen some of the executions . . . especially in the provinces where they haven't any experienced man on hand and give the job to a butcher's apprentice who's so nervous that he makes a sickening mess and causes so much pain! I'm a doctor, you know. I can't help thinking about pain, and how to avoid inflicting it. But I don't know why I'm talking about all this to . . . to the inventor of 'Socialism', who has so many much more important things on his mind."

He grinned slyly, and St. Simon took it in good part. "Go on," he said. "I'm a human being like everyone else. Anything that can diminish the amount of pain in the world——"

"Well," said the doctor, obviously torn between his desire to talk about his preoccupation and his misgivings at its gruesomeness, "I was so disgusted by something I saw when I was young, in the Market Place at Rheims—goodness knows why they have to do these things in public!—that I felt I simply must get to work and think out some way of doing things more humanely. I studied a device they used to have in England—"The Halifax Maiden", they called it—and another one the Italians use—"Mannaia," or some such name. I got a German to help me—two Germans, to be exact. The first one was only a carpenter, a piano-builder, but he wanted to charge so much money for his work that the Assembly would never have looked at it, and I had to find another, a fellow called Tobias Schmidt. Both of them seemed to enjoy the work.

They're funny people, the Germans. Anyway, Schmidt and I have worked out quite a reasonable device. . . . Horrible, I grant you, but I swear I've only thought of it as far less horrible than seeing men and women mangled by a butcher's apprentice. It's just a device for putting a criminal to death by the quickest and kindest way that can be managed. A very heavy knife-blade, running down grooves and severing the neck in less than a second. Of course, if the Assembly do accept my idea, no one will ever believe that it was meant to save pain. I shall probably be labelled as a monster of morbid cruelty." Doctor Guillotin paused, looking with shy pathos at his lanky companion. "I expect," he said, "the thing will get called after me—'Guillotine,' or some such name. But I shan't mind. So long as it does its work, and puts poor people out of their misery quickly."

They were approaching the road and the little inn where the dinner ordered for one awaited two hungry but otherwise ill-matched companions. St. Simon was still leading, though at a more considerate pace; he opened the little gate which led from the fields into the back stable-yard of the inn.

"I'm afraid you're right," he said, "about going down to history as a monster of morbidity. Long before you die peacefully in your bed—and I hope that won't be for many years—there'll probably be a legend about the wicked Doctor Guillotin who invented a hideous machine for torturing people—and was the first victim to be put to death on it! But what do legends matter? And, anyway, if things go as they should, there'll be no need to put anyone to death soon. If everyone had equal chances in this world, equal wages and property, there'd soon be no crime, no motive for crime. I know you'll think me a fanatic, Doctor, but if I may send you a copy of my book when I've finished it, I think you'll see that——"

He broke off short. They had passed under the shadowy arch of the coach entrance and emerged into the little front garden where tables were laid for *al fresco* dinner. It was alive with men, armed men, half in uniform and half in rags. They were drinking, gesticulating, quarrelling. Their accents, their picturesque attire, smacking of the sea, gave them a foreign

atmosphere not altogether misleading. They had marched some hundreds of miles—and in astoundingly good order—before reaching the inn at Ponthierry. They had come from homes that looked out, not upon the Seine but upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean. And lest anyone should think they did not mean business, lest anyone imagined that the muskets they carried were merely for scaring blackbirds on the way, they had dragged with them a couple of small cannon, which now stood rather forlornly by the roadside, while the gun-teams drowned their excusable thirst in glasses of good white Burgundy.

"Who the devil——?" began St. Simon, halting under the shadow of the arch. He seemed more puzzled and even taken aback than his precise little comrade.

"I should guess that they were from the South," said Doctor Guillotin. "I should guess they were . . ."

"And you guess right, little man!" One of the strangers rose from his rusticated seat and brandished a long-stemmed wine-glass towards the doctor. "And if your *sans-culotte* friend doesn't know Provençal men when he sees them, then it's time he had a lesson in geography!"

St. Simon bridled. It was evident that he was sufficiently a fanatic to resent banter. "I know more geography than you," he said aggressively. "And if you are from Marseilles, perhaps you'll tell me why the devil you've been trundling those wheelbarrows of yours all the way to Ponthierry! Why didn't you stay where you belong, instead of making nasty noises along our roads?"

The Southerner disentangled himself from between his seat and table, and walked towards them with a suavity that was almost menacing. "We didn't stay where we belong," he said, "because we had marching orders from the Municipality of Marseilles—the Municipality of a city that was a city when Paris was still mud-flats! We hear things in Marseilles. We've heard that there is a kind of a revolution in Paris . . . oh, quite a little, little revolution! Nothing to bother about! But we thought it was time that it spread sail and got under way a trifle smarter! We thought it was time that Paris taught the King and the Priests and that damned Austrian

bitch that France is getting tired of them." He balanced his glass in his hand as if he were about to throw its contents at St. Simon's face. Then he looked at it again, and saw that he had already emptied it down his own throat. He returned to the table to refill it from the half-depleted carafe. "Ohé!" he shouted. "Last drinks! Last stage before Paris! No stragglers, and no falling out. There were five hundred and one of us that paraded on the Cannebière a month ago, and there are going to be five hundred and one to answer the roll-call outside the Tuileries to-morrow . . . or, by God, I'll know the reason why!"

They obeyed their leader: one could hardly speak of officers among such a motley crew. They were of the kind that does not think of discipline in terms of uniformly polished buttons.

In a minute or two the last glasses were drained, the human teams with naked backs had harnessed themselves to the guns. The whole column was forming with more than military precision along the centre of the road. Their southern faces, tanned to a golden-brown, were turned towards Paris. It was not till they were well under way, not till the last of the five hundred was swinging past the inn garden, that they began to lift their voices in the song that was to carry the name of Marseilles into every quarter of the globe.

St. Simon watched them out of sight. Since he had taken to rags, he had learnt how to endure being ignored, and even insulted, by anyone with a *louis* in his pocket, anyone with recognised work to do. But it was harder to watch those guns go past and remember that one had once been an artilleryman, had once helped to batter Yorktown into surrender. The Marseillais had discipline, but they were clearly amateurs with their guns. St. Simon sighed as he sat down with Doctor Guillotin to a pleasanter little dinner than he had tasted for months.

He was strangely silent as he ate it, glancing every now and then along the dusty road. The doctor chattered about the weather, about the bad housing in the Paris suburbs, about anything and everything that might awake the interest of his moody companion. Before they had arrived at dessert, he gave up the attempt to draw sociability from the Socialist, and

began to wonder why he had invited him to dinner. He sat enjoying the freshness of the country air, the sight of green branches across the road. It was only after some five minutes of silence that St. Simon spoke at last.

"I've been thinking, Doctor," he said, "that if fellows like those Marseillais men were to lay hands on a certain lady who had the misfortune to be born in Austria, they mightn't wait till you and your German friends had finished your carpentry. They might prefer the old methods of the butcher's apprentice . . . only I don't suppose they'd bungle matters by being nervous."

The doctor could not repress a momentary shudder. "There are only five hundred of them," he said, "and there must be close on a million Parisians. I hardly think we need fear that the good people of Paris will be reduced to barbarism by their puny invasion."

"Well, let's hope you are right," said St. Simon, "though God knows Paris could do with a little blood-letting. Some of the 'good' people, as you call them, would be a great deal better if they were dead."

"That may be true," answered the doctor, picking the peel of his apple with the little folding fruit-knife he had taken from his pocket, "but unfortunately it isn't the objectionable people who get what they deserve in time of Revolution. The really noxious have a way of surviving, and even controlling Revolutions, while Conviction, Integrity, Heroism are perishing on the scaffold or battlefield."

St. Simon set an obstinate jaw. "It's been like that in the past," he said, "but it'll be different soon. Wait till my book is published. I am going to teach people how to be happy without slaughtering each other, without any more Revolutions."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and waved a vague finger in the air. "Books!" he said ambiguously. Then he leant forward a little and spoke more confidentially. "I was thinking just now," he said, "that the people you most need to persuade—Danton and Robespierre, for instance—are all good *bourgeois*, as *bourgeois* as . . . well, as I am myself. We carry umbrellas to the Assembly. And you won't find the *bourgeois*

very sympathetic when you start talking about redistributing his property. He wasn't born to a great deal of it, not as much as you aristocrats, but it means more to him. I only hope, for your sake, that if the Assembly does sanction the use of my humane executioner, it won't be used to get rid of . . . what was the word again? . . . oh yes, Socialists. I think you might be wiser to leave your book unpublished and wait for another Revolution—one that isn't controlled by journalists, or provincial attorneys—or even doctors."

He fell silent a moment, slicing his apple and eating it with meticulous daintiness. It had always been his contention that a philanthropist need not forget, in his preoccupation with greater issues, that good manners, even good table-manners, can make their contribution to the sum of Human Happiness. But he seemed a little saddened by something that had happened—perhaps by something that was likely to happen in Paris, now that the men from Marseilles were at its gates, singing their astonishing song.

"I only hope you are right about one thing," he said pensively. "I only hope that Progress will soon be making people a little more sensible, so that there will be no need of a Guillotine."

II

THEY WOULD NOT LET THE SWISS GIRL INTO the Palace. The Guard would not even let her cross the river: M. De Mandat had put a garrison on the *Pont Royal* and no one was allowed to pass. She told them that her uncle, the great M. Curtius, was in the Tuileries—had been there through the night, like all good Royalists in Paris—and that he had sent home for his second pair of pistols. To prove her story, she showed them to the Guard—beautiful, silver-mounted pistols with the Zürich gunmaker's name. They merely laughed. They had their orders from M. Mandat, and the last thing they could let pass was a woman with weapons on her, however plausible her story.

Maria Grossholz turned back, determined to walk downstream along the southern quay until she could find some other passage over the river: the next bridge, if it were guarded at all, might have good Switzers on it, instead of the National Guards—perhaps her own brothers or cousins would be among them. In any case, they would let Fräulein Maria Grossholz pass, carrying pistols to her uncle.

It was early, hardly five o'clock in the morning. She had left home breakfastless, before the milk-barrow came round, and she had the good appetite of her race. A peep down one of the narrow side-streets that led off the quay showed that there was a dingy little baker's shop open, with a small table thrust out on to the pavement, half in shadow, half in the morning sun. A man was sitting at it, with arms crossed, head sunk and heels thrust forward upon the cobbles. Counting the *sous* in her purse, she turned along the alley, ordered coffee and bread from the shop, and sat down at the battered little table.

The man did not move or raise his eyes to her. She noticed that he was quite young, and in uniform—an officer's uniform, though it was frayed and out-at-elbow. His cheeks were lean and haggard, his long black hair ran wild. When she gave him

"Good morning," he merely grunted and shifted his boots on the cobbles. But she could not help noticing that, as her breakfast was brought, he cast at it a glance of momentary envy.

She did not like to offer him anything, but as she crunched the bread with strong young teeth, she managed to let a large crust escape her hand and bounce down, close to him, on the table.

"It's cool now," she said timidly, "but it's going to be hot again. Do you really think that there will be fighting?"

He grunted again and waved a finger towards the southern suburbs. The distant church-bells were ringing a summons, and even in that narrow alley one could hear the throb of drums.

"Well, the Palace is well guarded," said Maria. "My uncle says that M. De Mandat has arranged everything splendidly. They stopped even me at the bridge." She glanced at the officer's epaulettes, to make sure that he was a real officer, holding the King's commission—not one of the many non-descripts that the Revolution had put into uniform. "You're not going to the Tuileries?" she asked. "You're not stationed there to-day?"

"I'm stationed in the South," he said irritably. "A very long way south. I'm only here on leave." He took hold of her crust as he spoke. "But I'm a soldier," he went on, "and if there's to be fighting—even street fighting—I want to see it. I want to see who wins—and why!" He shifted and leant across the table, staring up the narrow street at the Tuileries Quay. The girl took a sip of coffee. She wanted to give him some: she wanted to make him take his coat off and let her darn the hole in his elbow: she noticed he had tried to catch it up with clumsy stitches that would not last a week. She found herself liking his face, and wondering what made him so rude and unapproachable. She was too young, and had always been too comfortable, to know the signs of Pride at the mercy of Poverty.

"But I'm sure the King's people will win," she said. "A mob couldn't beat the Switzers, not even with the Marseilles men to help it; and there are hundreds of volunteers—my uncle's

one of them—who are guarding the palace. M. De Mandat's leading them, and——”

“The King should be leading them himself!” interrupted the young officer. “He should have ridden round the barricades, on a white horse, in his best uniform, and told his men to hold them or die. All he did—I was there an hour ago and saw him—was to slouch up to the sentinels with his wig askew, and say that he hoped there would be no bloodshed. And as to your M. Mandat—look over there!”

He pointed up the alley and across the water. It was indeed M. Mandat, riding from the Tuileries towards the centre of the city.

“What does it mean?” said the girl. “He can't be deserting his——”

“Deserting? No!” The young man leant back in his chair with an unpleasantly bitter smile. “The municipality of Paris is responsible for order in the city,” he said. “They've sent for Mandat twice already, to ask him what his arrangements are at the Palace. He had the sense to refuse their summonses. I suppose they've sent a third now; the fool's going, and his fool of a King is letting him go—to avert unpleasantness! And as soon as the municipality has got him safely at the Town Hall, they can keep him there: they can wink an eye at their friends in the suburbs, to say that the Tuileries is without a commandant and can be safely attacked. He'll not be returned to the Tuileries until the firm of Danton, Marat, Robespierre and Co. thinks it safe to despatch him back—to find his men butchered and the King a prisoner! All's one for that! The King doesn't deserve to be King, if he can't defend his own palace . . . May I take a morsel of that bread?”

He had already devoured the crust from her roll and now took all that she had left—to say nothing of a half-cup of tepid coffee.

Fräulein Grossholz rose from her chair and surveyed the ruins of her breakfast. She was beginning to wonder why she had felt kindly disposed to this young fellow, with his insolent manners and cynical talk. Certainly, his face was interesting, though she no longer found it attractive. She could no more foresee the future than he could. She could not know that,

when those haggard cheeks had filled out to sleekness, when the wild hair had been tamed and cut to show the bullet-head, she would one day be modelling his likeness in coloured wax.

"If the King is in as much danger as you pretend," she said, "I should have thought that every French soldier—even an officer on leave—should be hurrying to the Tuileries to help the Switzers fight."

He sat unmoved. He had grown thick-skinned to every kind of taunt and insult since he first entered an army officered by alien aristocrats who did not share his high estimate of his own powers and Destiny.

"That's all talk!" he snapped at her, as she turned away to continue her journey through the strangely deserted streets. "And anyway, I'm not French. I told you I was stationed a long way South. I was born at Ajaccio, and I am a Corsican."

THEY HAD BEEN AWAKE ALL NIGHT in the Tuileries, doubly awake since half-past one, when the lonely cannon-shot had announced that the suburbs were rising, had ushered in the long hours of distant tocsin and threatening drums. The whole building was filled with armed men, Switzers, National Guards, and volunteers—townsmen with pistols or fowling-pieces, white-haired courtiers with muskets from the barracks, boys and pages fingering their little gilt Court swords. There were six thousand souls in the vast, ramshackle Palace, and most of them were straining their eyes from some barricaded window. But outside, in the *Carrousel*, along the water-front, or down the long sweep of the terraced gardens, there was no sign whatever of an enemy.

Mandat had not exactly been detained by the Municipality: he was lying murdered at its doors. The National Guard were wavering: the men at the bridge-head had already abandoned their post and gone home to breakfast—or over to the enemy. But there were good stout walls, a fine field of fire in most directions, and fourteen cannon, to answer the three which the Marseillais had trundled up from their home. And if there were no officer in charge whom the garrison could trust, there was at least a woman to evoke all their chivalrous

devotion, a woman more Royal than the poor King she had disastrously married.

She had awakened from her short slumbers to stand beside Princess Elisabeth at an eastward window and see the sun rise over Paris. They watched it gild the edges of the buildings that overhung the *Carrousel*, the top of the wooden paling that hid the square from them, the trim stones of the courtyard beneath their feet. Then Marie-Antoinette turned away to rouse her husband, and send him out to hearten his men for battle. He had gone already, unshaven and heavy-eyed, to show them for what strange manner of man their desperate loyalty was needed. She came back to her sister-in-law in impotent anger and dismay. The two women waited an hour and more together, hardly knowing for what—their chairs side by side, their hands in each other's lap. Then Marie-Antoinette rose and walked again to the window. The clamour of tocsins had suddenly died away. In the cool hush of morning one could distinguish the striking of half-past seven.

A moment later a head—two heads—bobbed up from behind the paling. A pointed musket was sufficient to make them vanish again, but the noise from the square was growing, the danger obvious. Marie-Antoinette turned back to hurry through the labyrinth of rooms and warn the King—to warn someone more military than he—that trouble was brewing along the East Façade.

No one had known from which side to expect attack. Those who looked westward across the gardens to the Place Louis XV and the Champs-Élysées could see a small mob gathered round the Riding-school. The Assembly was already gathering, and the people were cheering or cursing the deputies who entered to discuss whatever triviality or abstraction was on the agenda for this tenth day of August. The mob might grow, or give place to a more dangerous one from the suburb St. Honoré. They must still watch, and could only afford to send a few men to the east side of the Palace, to satisfy the Queen's insistence.

Before the few could reach their new stations, the gate in the paling had swayed, cracked and splintered, the square had belched its tide of armed humanity into the Royal court-

yard. Those who knelt at the windows above still hesitated to fire, still wondered if this were indeed the attack.

It was not—or not yet. The attack must be preceded by something from within, something more subtly dangerous. M. Roederer, of the Paris Municipality, must play an unexpected part in the Palace, whither he had been sent on an ambiguous errand. At a moment when only ruthless obstinacy could save the monarchy of France, he must decide—and perhaps with sincerity—that he could save it by retirement and surrender. Marie-Antoinette, searching the Palace for her husband and his permission to open fire upon the courtyard, found him in M. Roederer's net, found him already half persuaded that he could save a massacre by prompt and dignified retreat.

"The National Assembly has invited Your Majesties," M. Roederer was saying, "to take refuge in the Riding-school. As Your Majesty knows, the Assembly possesses the confidence of the Nation. If Your Majesty would be so good as to take a short walk, along the avenue of chestnuts there, Your Majesty would be saving his friends here—and his poor subjects outside—from the horrors of mutual slaughter. Surely it is not much to ask."

King Louis looked earnestly at M. Roederer from short-sighted eyes. He could not see that it was beyond his power to save his friends or subjects, already ranked for mutual slaughter; all he could do was to ensure that they died for nothing—to decide nothing except what he was already deciding by surrender. No instinct could warn him that by treading the few hundred yards between the chestnuts he was helping to set a million Frenchmen marching to their deaths, between Torres Vedras and the Beresina, between the Pyramids and Waterloo. All he could see was the plausible, the probably sincere M. Roederer: and King Louis, diffident as ever, had persuaded himself that M. Roederer was wiser than the King and Queen of France.

She stormed and begged and appealed. She discounted danger for her brave friends and welcomed it for herself. She swore that she could see more clearly than a dozen municipal authorities a hundred tender-hearted Kings. But at the back

of her mind lay the nagging thought that she was too late: that she had too often given unwise counsel and could no longer persuade, even when she was so clearly in the right: that the great Beast had now hooked its claw into her gates, into her own flesh and blood, and would wrench until both were torn asunder. They fell silent before her rage and despair, and in their silence her misgivings surged up to cloud her brain. Then M. Roederer spoke for the last time. He did not even need to complete his sentence.

"If Your Majesty wishes," he said, "to shoulder the responsibility for her own death, and that of her husband, her son and daughter . . ."

The last four words were enough. She had long ceased to be proud of her skill as a Queen. She knew that she was a mother and might save her children while a Kingdom crashed about her ears.

FRAÜLEIN MARIA GROSSHOLZ, pressed against the iron railing of the garden, watched the little procession emerge from the Palace doors, and enter the avenue, a dozen Switzers marching as its guard. She saw her patronne, Madame Elisabeth, and the Princess De Lamballe—cast off in prosperous days—returned to share hardships and danger with the Queen. Marie-Antoinette walked with her children's hands grasped firmly in her own, until the little Dauphin darted forward to kick up the withered leaves into a tempest, to gather and throw a cloud of them at his sister.

"They are falling early this year," said Louis. "It is only August."

Those who walked with him heard the words, and perhaps despised the man who could speak them at such a moment. If the Switzers beside them heard, they hardly understood: they were more likely to be counting their chances of escaping from a ghastly death, so soon as the Assembly doors had closed upon their Royal master.

The mob on the threshold parted sufficiently for their sovereigns to squeeze through, but it spared neither threats nor insults. The Assembly, gravely pedantic now that its

invitation was accepted, professed itself overawed by the presence of Majesty, unable to debate freely with Majesty visibly listening. The Royal Family must retire to the stifling little box which had been fitted up for the shorthand reporters, behind the grille of wooden bars that hid them from the debating members. On the threshold of that prison the Queen stopped and shuddered: it was as if she guessed that, once entering, she must not expect to see daylight again except through dungeon bars.

They were hardly within before they knew that the slaughter had begun. It was not the screams and groans outside, where the crowd tore their late escort to pieces. It was the distant but ferocious lilt of the *Marseillaise*, the long roll of musketry, and the boom of cannon from the Palace the King had abandoned. The King still strove to stop it. He sent a verbal order to his friends and bodyguard to cease firing. He had a note scribbled down to the same effect, and signed it with shaking hand. He never signed another Royal order. The members beyond the grille still discussed their trivialities and abstractions: but they knew that the time was almost ripe to discuss and decide a more momentous issue, the abolishment of kingship in the land of France.

They might still have held out in the Palace. They might still have blown the Paris mob back to its suburb, the more desperate men from Marseilles to whatever Kingdom Come awaited them. The out-at-elbows officer who had so insufficiently breakfasted—Captain Napoleon Bonaparte, of the 4th Regiment of Artillery—was watching the struggle from the quayside with an expert's eye: he told the frightened little clerk at his elbow that, given a leader, the Switzers should win the battle. But, in place of a leader, they had now an order to cease fire.

It was an order to cease life, an order to give themselves up to massacre. They obeyed it. Some no doubt wondered why they, who had only hired themselves out as doorkeepers and footmen to a foreign monarch, should be under any obligation to throw away their lives, because these foolish Frenchmen had suddenly run mad. Others, and the majority, were soldiers. They had eaten the French King's bread and salt,

taken his money through years of ornamental idleness: now at last he had given them a chance to earn their wages. They fell back from bullet-scarred windows, they turned away from barricaded doors at which the King's enemies already battered. They gathered in two bodies, on the staircase and in the entrance hall. They fell into position for their last parade.

Some of their comrades lay dead already in the garden. The volunteers who had come to assist them were now relinquishing the useless struggle. Herr Curtius, escaped from the fight to meet his niece, had to hold her back as she strove to elbow her way to the garden-gate, and run to see whether this body or that, lying so still and quiet, might be all that was left of a brother or a kinsman. It was not safe for a woman to be seen weeping over dead Switzers while the scum of Paris was plundering, was kicking and dishonouring the dead.

As the Switzers withdrew from their posts in the Palace, Paris surged in to break or befoul, to hunt old servants and boys like rats through the attics, to swarm down the cellar steps and drink itself to death among the splintered wine-casks. When the uproar had reached its height, the main door was thrown open and the columns of the Swiss Guard marched out into the gardens, muskets unloaded, but heads held high and proud. Down the trim paths they wound, along the shady avenues. The leaves fell faster now, as bullets burrowed and crashed through the foliage. At every step the Switzers fell, their scarlet coats spattered with sudden crimson. The flower-beds were littered with their dead, the rose-trees drank deep of the blood from Zürich and Lucerne. Horribly mangled, the first column passed the Assembly's walls. The prisoners in the reporters' box heard the steady tramp of their boots upon the gravel, the sudden break of rhythm as a remnant of them, when flesh and blood could stand no more, scattered and fled for safety.

The second column, gaining the swing-bridge at the garden's end, could only debouch upon the open *Place* beyond, more deadly even than the avenues. They reached the statue in its centre, formed square around it, and faced outwards to await their death.

King Louis the Fifteenth, whose grandson and successor they served, still rose in marble from the spot where soon a guillotine must stand. He still smiled, as he had smiled at his Pompadour and Dubarry, as he had feigned to smile at tales of defeat and bankruptcy, at the Deluge that he himself foresaw. And round his feet the bullets whined and slapped, the scarlet coats dropped one by one into the dust.

III

THE SHORTHAND WRITERS COULD GET BACK into their box. They could peer through its *grille* and watch the debates that were making France a Republic. They could record the defiant speeches of the deputies, while reports of foreign invasion piled up on the Assembly table and the speakers ignored the fact that Paris had no defence except meagre armies in which the old discipline had been sapped and destroyed, or inadequate new levies, whose raw enthusiasm was a poor substitute for training. The newspapers for which they scribbled behind the lattice were published in haste (since Time grew pressing), eagerly devoured by all, and freely circulated in every quarter of the city, except in those gloomy rooms where the Royal prisoners, the late occupants of the stuffy reporters' box, now sat cut off from Paris.

Time had no meaning in their gaol. Time was a succession of colourless days, with nothing to distinguish one from the other. It had been early August when they had been penned in to listen to the debates of the Assembly, while their Palace, the thousand-year-old tradition of their kingship, was being pillaged and destroyed. From Friday to Monday they had listened, stifled and half starved, only released at night to walk a few steps to the neighbouring Convent of the Feuillants, and sleep in the bare cells of the monks. On Monday evening two great coaches were waiting outside the door of the Feuillants to take the Royal Family to the Temple, to what had once been their brother D'Artois' Gothic and eccentric home.

The Queen had once supped with him there: she had begged him, as if in superstitious fear, to have the place pulled down. It would have taken some pulling: they built massively in the days when the Templars returned from Crusade to pile up fortresses for themselves in the heart of Europe's capitals. Those who inherited from them—D'Artois in Paris, the lawyers in London—had six-foot walls to keep them cool, an oppressive

gloom in which to read briefs or give supper-parties. The Paris Temple with its four huge towers and close-barred arrow-slits was the more typical of its age, more reminiscent of the castles that had hoped to bar Saladin from the Holy Land. M. D'Artois had spent a small fortune on candles, when he lived there. It was ablaze with hundreds now, as the two coaches finally pushed their way through the crowds in the *Rue Phelipeau*, and rolled into the cobbled courtyard. The prisoners stretched their cramped limbs and entered—Louis, Marie-Antoinette and the children: only Elisabeth was with them. The Princess of Lamballe, the others who had walked beside them along the chestnut avenue, were now pent in other gaols. The candles flickered, the huge door swung to, the noise of crowds was muffled. Time stood still.

They were not altogether unhappy. If they must suffer, and fear new sufferings, an immense weight of responsibility had been lifted from their shoulders. They could hardly acknowledge the right of the Assembly to depose them, but how could they be held responsible for France when they were allowed no contact with her, no newspapers, no tidings of her war? They were surrounded with faithful servants and secret well-wishers, eager to look after their comforts. Commissioners from the Commune of Paris took turn and turn about to watch jealously for domestic plots to rescue them, or even give them news. The signals they tried to arrange with their servants (the finger on the right eye, as one waited at table, to announce that the Austrians were nearing Lille; the hand spread over the nose to report that they were within fifty miles of Paris), all this was more game than reality, and a poor Intelligence system for those who had once ruled a kingdom. It was better to forget that they were rulers, and remember that they were parents. Louis was allowed a little library of classics and text-books; he read long hours, but broke off to teach history and geography to his little boy: father and son pored over maps with an equally schoolboyish eagerness, while Marie-Antoinette sat sewing with Elisabeth, or showed Madame Royale, now nearing her fourteenth birthday, how handkerchiefs should be embroidered. It was almost a relief to hear so little of the movements of kings and armies. It was

almost a relief when some fantastic plot for escaping from the Temple—hatched and prosecuted with faint and doubting heart—had to be abandoned because its inventor was suspected and dismissed from service, because the necessary disguises could not be smuggled in, or the children, dressed up as the lamplighters' two boys, the kitchen-maid and her little sister, could not after all be smuggled out. For no plot was contemplated for an instant which would save any member of the little family and leave the rest in the care of the Republic.

Outside, the Republic, at desperate war with Europe, scented plots and conspiracies in everything. To have emigrated, to have fled from a gutted château and an armed mob of one's own tenants—this was to have plotted against the Revolution. If conscience forbade a priest to take the oath prescribed by the Assembly, then he was a counter-Revolutionary conspirator. Those few Swiss who had escaped the massacre in the gardens, those who had broken and run for the shelter of the Feuillants, were now on trial for having defended themselves in the Tuileries until the Order to Cease Fire was sounded: they were 'accomplices in the Conspiracy of August 10th'. The tribunal erected to murder them more judicially was soon to be the working instrument of a general Terror. If their master, the King who had given the Order, was not yet arraigned, he was denounced with the same jargon. "He is held guilty of every crime," wrote the ironic Gouverneur Morris, now Ambassador for the United States, "and particularly the frightful crime of not allowing his own throat to be cut, which is certainly an abominable conspiracy against the Nation." But the criminal heard little of his indictment: he was happy in his curious way, reading Livy and showing maps to his son.

There was one interruption, and a terrifying one, in the first days of September. The foreign armies were within fifty miles of Paris; they might be at its gates before the week was out. The Great Beast stirred in terror. Marat lashed it with newspaper articles of redoubled frenzy: Danton made provocative speeches to its respectable representatives in the Assembly and sent secret messages to its more unwholesome lairs. Terror grew to the blood-lust of panic. The prisons of Paris were

crammed to overflowing with suspected conspirators. A mob could clear them quickly with butcher's knife or sabre. The Prussians had taken Longwy, were taking Verdun: there was no time for trials and formalities. If Government hesitated, the mob could effect the clearance in the course of a single night.

The rumour of it reached the Temple, the screams of intoxicated murderers parading the streets with fragments of human body on the pikes, mutilated with unspeakable indecency. The Commissioners who took their turn that night, watching the Royal Family, had the most reliable news of approaching mobs. They talked of sending for troops, guns even, to guard the Templar's castle. Marie-Antoinette was calm, clasping her children; her husband, generally fearless and at his best in danger, began to lose his head. He paced the room with chattering teeth, while the noise grew louder and louder. It is not easy for a prisoner to be fearless, waiting powerless in a trap for the Beast to come and rend him. The Commissioners had neither troops nor guns; they barred the door with frail but effective barriers—a single strand of tricolour ribbon, a thin stream of soothing speech. Their spokesman must applaud the massacre, flatter those, even, who came carrying or dragging unmentionable things into the courtyard of the Temple. He begged that the Royal prisoners should be preserved for judgment and the scaffold. A public and salutary example, he told them, would be even more effective than their midnight justice, would “inspire the peoples of the world with a devout respect for France”.

They applauded their own deeds at other prisons, their own forbearance at the Temple. They turned from the door to march in triumph round the courtyard. Marie-Antoinette crouched with her children beside their trembling father, heard the yells of the maniacs and saw the shadow-dance from their torches along her prison ceiling. She heard her own name, preceded and followed by every imaginable blasphemy. She advanced to the window, and stared proudly out upon her enemies.

There was a face outside, the face of a faithful friend. It was close to the bars, though the window stood fifteen feet

above the courtyard. It had been Madame De Lamballe's, but now it swayed unnaturally upon the point of a jiggling pike. "Kiss her! Kiss your doxy for the last time!" howled the mob, as the Queen fell fainting to the stone-flagged floor.

PARIS WAS QUIETER NEXT DAY. Even the Great Beast was sated for the moment, having crowned its banquet with the child-prisoners, the little boys gaoled at the Salpêtrière for picking pockets or pulling long noses at their betters. One did not speak about it. One did not try to cover up that sickening horror by talking of a conspiracy among gutter-snipes against Property or the Authority of the Grown-up. One talked a little about Philippe D'Orléans (Philip-Equality, as he now called himself), and what he had said—or not said—when the mob brought their pikeload round to his Palais Royal and made Madame De Lamballe peer in at his windows. He did not even look out. He heard what was afoot and said: "Well, let us have supper." Nothing could make Philip lose his head, except the guillotine that awaited him at no great distance of time.

The prisoners in the Temple heard nothing of all this. Paris seemed strangely silent. They strained their ears above its roofs for the sound of Prussian guns; but they could hardly tell in what direction to listen, nor whether to listen in hope.

They should have turned towards Varennes. In that direction, under the lonely windmill of Valmy, the last hope of the Revolution was martialled. France had no cavalry to speak of; her horsemen had loved their King, and they had either deserted for home or now rode side by side with Austrian hussars and the squadrons on which Frederick the Great had once lavished such stern care. The infantry was a rabble of inexperienced enthusiasts or reluctant conscripts, who had fled, hopelessly outnumbered, from the first skirmishes on the frontier. But Louis might have felt a strange pride in knowing that the artillery, the branch of the service he had insisted on reorganising, was still in a fit state to stand up to the invaders who were coming to rescue him. The guns still bore his crown and monogram. Some were still engraved with the royal

catchword—*Ultima Ratio Regum*—the Last Argument of Kings. They were now parked round Valmy mill, waiting to argue against the Kings of Europe—and to win the noisy and malodorous dispute. For the invaders, too, had their difficulties—as well as their mutual jealousies. Nothing in the world turns so soon into fossil as a military system, and Frederick had been six years dead. The army with which he had beaten the converging hosts of Russia, Austria and France was now halted, mastered, and driven into retreat by a shower of cannon-balls and a slope too muddy for the goose step.

TIME WAS PASSING, though there was nothing but greyer skies and chillier draughts to mark its passage for the Queen imprisoned in the Temple. Once, in November, a face—dark but not unhandsome—looked in upon her and her family with sharp eyes that had once been the ruin of her hopes. Drouet, Postmaster at Ste. Meneshould, was now an emissary of the Assembly. She did not know him, had never seen him before. He had ridden her to failure at Varennes, but had not been among the arguers at the house of Sauce the grocer. He did not stay long in the Temple: he was bound for the frontier. Ex-dragoon Drouet, his Republican loyalty proved up to the hilt, was just the man to revive the dying tradition of the cavalry that must meet her Imperial brother's squadrons in the field. He passed out of her life—to meet her lover in strange circumstances and to take stranger flight through the air, among the mountains of her childhood's country.

If he and others were helping to ratify the verdict of Valmy, were loosening the grip that had threatened to strangle Paris, the Great Beast had been too fully roused to forget its lust for Royal blood. It approached its dungeon and larder upon stealthier paws. It seemed to show momentary mercy, while it considered by what steps to break up the family life that still united the victims in the depths of its dark cavern. A newly elected Commune made laxer rules for the prisoners, sent more sympathetic Commissioners. Marie-Antoinette, 'Madame Capet', as they unhistorically called this bride of the Bourbons, was allowed a spinet to while away her hours. She sat at it

listlessly enough, and then picked out, as if in disdain, the first few bars of the *Marseillaise*. It could mean little to her, who had loved Mozart and patronised Glück. It was filled with the tones of the Revolutions, the tones of the future which advanced upon her over the dead bodies of those she had loved.

They brought her a little news—such news as might be judged harmless. They told her that General Lafayette (as he now spelt himself) had at last parted company with the Revolution. She was still unjust to him; God alone—or perhaps the Devil—knew the origin of her unreasoning enmity. Its roots went deep enough: the roots of all his misfortunes lay in girlish acts or words or even gestures that she had long forgotten. It was close on twenty years since he had first come to court, wealthy, blue-blooded, aristocratic, for all his rustic upbringing. Perhaps, even then, she had heard in his voice the same tones (or their faintly menacing echo) as blared more loudly in the *Marseillaise*: perhaps the irritation they roused in her had provoked the enmity, made her wound him with her contemptuous laughter when he made a *faux pas* in her minuet. He had now ceased, for a time, to be the apostle of a hateful future. He had joined her lover Fersen in exile—if not in friendship. When the news reached him that she and her husband had been deposed, he had been too honest to violate the oath he had taken to them, and yet too scrupulous to lead his army against the new Republic which claimed, as heirs to Monarchy, the allegiance of their soldiers. He had ridden over the frontier alone, trotted alone into the little Belgian fortress of Bouillon, whence Godfrey had set out on the quixotic ride to Jerusalem. He had gone to earth in foreign places where neither Fersen nor other more ignoble *émigrés* could reproach him with former follies and vanities, as well as former honesties. The Revolution he left behind him might never have turned from its efforts to limit Monarchy, never launched out on its schemes to destroy, but for the strange enmity between that lonely rider and his now imprisoned Queen.

But the tinkle of a spinet could not drown the pad of the softly threatening paws. She was still busy with her needle, still careful to correct the Dauphin for failing to say "Good

morning" to the new, unexplained faces that appeared in their prison that was his nursery and schoolroom. One morning they took him from her, refusing to say where he must go. She was distraught, demanding his return, demanding a mother's rights, more sacred than the Rights of Man which M. De La Fayette had brought from America to be the dubious foundations of a Republic he now refused to serve. In an hour or two she had her way. They brought the child back, giving no reasons for the separation nor for their seeming repentance.

The reasons for other things were not stated, but she could not be long to guess them. She could even guess why, among the changing faces, the crabbed but steadfast countenance of old M. Malesherbes was appearing daily in the prison. M. Malesherbes was a lawyer with a long and honourable career behind him—too honourable, perhaps, for full success in his profession. He was now working on the last and least legal of his cases: he was closeted long hours with her husband: he was one of the few in Paris brave enough to defend, by appeal or argument, the King whose impending death made all Paris hold its breath, in savage expectation, in fear, or indignant resentment. M. Malesherbes had difficulty in getting the King to listen, to apply his mind to the business of appeal and argument. The cause was surely worth a little application, even on the part of one who was resigning himself to death, and had long been half across the threshold that parts reality from dreams, this world from other worlds. It signified little or nothing to France, while her sons on the frontier were rushing untrained to death in pursuit of the Prussians, that a middle-aged gentleman of comfortable life and slow brain should die the painless death of the guillotine a few years before his time. But it signified a very great deal that a thousand years should be cut short by the violence of that rumbling knife-blade.

For it was not on his guilt that the fears and defiances fought each other most bitterly. Most were agreed that he had 'conspired against the Nation': it was harder to agree upon his punishment. They must vote on it in the Assembly, and men swore that it could not be done by private voting. The deputies must stand up in their places, announce their whole opinion, to applause or threats from their colleagues and from

the crowds in the choked galleries. Even so, there was doubt until the last moment. There was an intake of shocked breath when Philip-Equality condemned his cousin to the scaffold. They needed his vote: they needed every vote they could get among the seven hundred who voted, the twenty-six who refused to vote. An appeal to the People they were supposed to represent was rejected. Then, by a majority of one clear vote, twenty-six given with reservations, the heir of ten past centuries was condemned to death in the name of those to come.

It was Thursday evening, and she was sitting apart from Elisabeth and the children. She had just scribbled on the fly-leaf of her book a text in Latin: it was that which records how a Pharisee judged it 'expedient' (he did not say 'just') 'that one man should die for the people'. She heard M. Malesherbes' light tread upon the stairs. There was no Louis in the Temple with whom he could be coming to confer. When the gaolers admitted him, she knew from his eyes what tidings entered with him.

She saw Louis again on the Sunday evening. The family was together for the last time. They spoke little, since there was little to say. Only the King took the uncomprehending hand of his little son, raised it in oath to Heaven and made the boy repeat that he would never attempt vengeance for his father. She grew fevered, swearing that she and the children would stay all night with him. He would not have it, even if the gaolers had allowed. He promised that he would see her next morning, at eight o'clock, before he left the Temple for ever.

The promise was kindly meant, and he broke it for kindness' sake. He walked to the tumbrel without adding another link to her chain of unbearable memories. She sat till ten o'clock on that grey Monday morning, hardly knowing what had happened. She did not realise that the silence in the nearby streets meant that all had flocked westward to the Square of Execution. She did not know that the faint roll of drums in the distance was designed to drown his voice when he tried to speak from his scaffold to the people that she had never taken to her heart, the people he had so clumsily and disas-

trously tried to love. The drums were ordered by the same man as saw him die with Christian firmness and then boasted of having spread the lie (still flitting round the world like an unclean vampire) that King Louis had to be thrown struggling on to the bed of Death.

When that far-off thunder ceased, when there were footsteps and voices again in the streets around the Temple, she could turn to Elisabeth and talk of needlework. They were allowing her black, and a widow had need of mourning.

IV

"WHAT A LOT OF LETTERS!" ELEANORA SULLIVAN looked with distaste at the untidy piles that littered Fersen's desk. Her classical, her undeniably beautiful nose seemed to sniff at them as though scenting the many rivals who kept her from conquering more than a small and unsatisfying fraction of his heart and mind. "I suppose Sophie's written her usual chatter," she said. "She's left her husband, hasn't she? I hope she finds that Taube person more interesting than he looks. And what's this one?" Eleanora picked up a freshly opened letter from the top of a pile. "This can't be her," she said. "The grammar's too good."

"What's that?" Axel seemed to wake up from a dream—from a nightmare, to judge by the woebegone expression on his face. "What are you doing?" he asked sharply. "Eleanora! Put that down at once!"

"Oh, very well. You needn't snap at me. I only came in to remind you that it's Sunday night and we're both expected at Count Merci D'Argenteau's. I looked in to see if you were getting ready. I'm going to wear this English taffeta that Crauford bought me yesterday. Do you think it suits me?"

She twisted round on her heels, graceful and conscious of her allurements. She began to pat her *fichu* into more becoming folds. Even in the grey light of a dull evening, her white skin shone with a disturbing brightness.

"What? Oh, yes," he said. "Very pretty. But I'm not coming to Merci's. I'm sick of these suppers and dances."

"Not coming? I believe you're sick of everything . . . of me, perhaps. I suppose you're angry with me because I said I wouldn't come back to Sweden with you, because I wouldn't leave Crauford. Anyway, Sweden's much too cold. I was born in Italy, and I'd freeze to death."

She laughed at her own words, with a sidelong glance that hoped he might laugh with her. But there was no response, no slackening of the strain and sorrow in his face.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, his fingers turning over the papers as he spoke. "I'm not going back to Sweden. I've just answered Father's letter, the one I showed you yesterday, begging me to return. Poor Father! It doesn't sound as if I shall ever see him again. But I told him I couldn't come back while there was still hope."

"Hope?" A slight shade passed over Eleanora's forehead. She had been loyal long enough, using her position and beauty, her Crauford's money, in any reasonable scheme for rescuing Marie-Antoinette or her children. She was sure, everyone except Axel agreed with her, that they were past rescue now. She was sorry for them, of course, but life must go on. "You'd be much better to come to Count Merci's," she said.

"That's for me to judge," he answered quietly. His eye was beginning to run over the papers in his hand, his voice grew far away. "Two years now we've been separated," he said, "except for that time in Paris, when you hid me in the attic. Eight months now since I had a letter. But I'll not go back to Sweden, I'll not come with you to a dance, while there's a single stone I can turn, even a letter I can write." The one he held in his hand was addressed to a man he loathed, though he had never met him. It was a last attempt to bribe Danton, who had once been venal enough. Now he was too intoxicated with Revolution to listen easily to the whisperings of Corruption. It would need vast sums. Fersen had hoped to get them from London: the execution of King Louis had been the signal for England to declare war: but England was more likely to spend her millions on frigates to conquer the rich West Indies, regiments to rescue the Low Countries and keep their markets open. By the time one had persuaded her to use it for the more chivalrous purpose of saving a Queen, Danton might have lost his position, might be following King Louis, preceding King Robespierre, to the guillotine.

"Will you go away now?" asked Fersen softly. "As you say, I've a lot of letters to answer."

It took him some minutes to be rid of her. She was a woman. He sometimes wondered whether he ought not to be rid of her for good—perhaps by accepting the Embassy offered him in London, whither she would not follow. But she was beautiful;

as she turned to go at last, the light seemed to grow dimmer in his lonely room. She loved him, in her own way. With her, he still meant something. She alone stood between him and the closing-down of that Melancholy he dreaded, that final acceptance of his fate as a spectator of other men's deeds. He had unwisely stepped upon the stage, ruined those he sought to help, and must retire into the audience again, to watch through a haze of unreality the tedious and sordid aftermath of Tragedy.

"Good night," he said to the closing door. "Enjoy yourself at *Merci's!*"

He picked up Sophie's letter. She, too, had been to a dance, a Court Ball in Stockholm. She had seen the boy King. His Little Majesty King Gustav IV had singled her out, talked much to her of his Ambassador, her brother. "Poor Axel!" he had said. "He seems so sad!" And when someone had spoken of the French Nation, he had flashed out that there was no such thing. "When people murder their King," he said, "they aren't a Nation any longer!"

He must finish off the letter to his father, with condolences on old age and failing health. He must write to little King Gustav, declining the offer of the London Embassy. Brussels was better, with Eleanora to comfort and ward off his melancholy. He would go on racking his brains for some way to help the woman who meant more to him than a hundred Eleanoras.

He wondered if the latest attempt would come to anything. A man called Ribbe had come to him with a scheme for rescuing her from the Temple. He had given him money and encouragement, and then heard no more. He had heard little of her except some meagre, second-hand news from a doctor who attended the children. It was not good news. The Temple withered its captives. The Doctor had not been able to recognise Elisabeth, beneath the marks of her suffering. One gathered that, if looks were all, Eleanora need not fear a moment's rivalry from the widowed Queen.

His pen began to move. He would write to De Staël first, thanking him for the copy of Germaine's latest pamphlet, her belated literary effort to save the Queen from the Revolution. He could not refrain from one bitter sentence, at the end of

the letter a little flick of the whip, at people who had long toyed with that which had killed her husband and was now threatening her life.

"I have nothing to regret," he wrote, "except that I have failed so completely in my efforts to save them. I have less to complain of than those who must now be reproaching themselves for having forgotten their benefactions and added to their misfortunes."

Young Erik, Erik no longer young, could help his wife laugh that off their consciences—in the intervals of her still-multiplying *liaisons* with those whom Revolution had made fashionable objects of desire. It was useless to be bitter, but a man must do something to save himself from madness.

He must write to Deux-Ponts about the returned prisoner, and the story—probably a lie—that the man had brought from France. He must write more trivial notes to be delivered round Brussels, to be posted to Aachen and Spa and Koblenz. He had taken a malicious pleasure in watching the hordes of *émigrés*, panic-stricken at the news of Valmy, pack up their over-bulky luggage and talk frantically to each other of London, Berlin, Stockholm—anywhere out of reach of the advancing armies of the Jacobins. He had watched them stampede from Brussels, as Dumouriez led his conscripts and enthusiasts over the frontier and into the heart of Belgium. But Dumouriez had been defeated, had turned traitor to the Republic. The whitecoats, with help from London and Berlin, had recaptured their province and penetrated into France again. Behind them the human tide of chattering exiles had seeped back into Brussels, to dine and dance and boast to each other, to flatter each other's wives and sleep with each other's mistresses. He had no right to be bitter. He was as much *émigré* as the rest, had left Brussels with them, and come seeping back behind the armies. He slept with Crauford's mistress. He had this moment been boasting to De Staël of his clear conscience, his unsuccessful efforts in the Cause. He was no better than the rest, save in knowing himself despicable.

He finished his notes to Koblenz and Aachen, repressing all temptations to bitterness. He wrote a letter to Taube and wondered where to address it. Taube flitted so fast nowadays,

game leg and all, between a Stockholm that sheltered Sophie and a Germany where he could still work as Sweden's agent against the Revolution. It was past bedtime when he had finished and Sophie herself was still unanswered.

She must stay unanswered to-night. He would scribble a few lines in his diary and go to bed. He reached down the book, turned to its half-finished page and dipped his pen in the ink. One could sometimes keep melancholy at bay by analysing its causes, writing them down for no eye but one's own. One could be honest with oneself, if one must still keep up the masquerade with others.

Sunday. Grey, rainy, very cold, he wrote. I have had a very foolish letter from De Staël with a useless, meaningless pamphlet of his wife's. Words; nothing real. Also a letter from Deux-Ponts about the release of M. D'Esbeck, who was a prisoner in France. His story about a plan to give the Queen up to the mob is horrible. I can't think of it without rage and suffering. The effect on my mind had to be felt. I sometimes think I'd be happier if her fate was decided, one way or the other. But then I think that if I lost her I should lose everything, and find myself alone in the world. Three royal sovereigns have been my benefactors and friends: I shall have lost them all, in the space of eighteen months: I think I shall soon lose my father. I have no one left, except a woman whom I love and am loved by. But we are very different in character; she belongs to another man; she cannot follow me nor I her, for ever. I am left with Sophie and Taube, and they are all I have to console me. But I can't make up my mind to get away from everything and live in Sweden: and I haven't sufficient money to go on with this unending travelling. Besides I like quiet. I need rest, some place where I can rest. Sometimes when I think of that, I feel very sad and afflicted. We have had no more news of the attempt Ribbe was making, and that makes me very anxious. I should be easier in mind if I were sure Danton had got the letter.

It was no good. She was still alive, might still be rescued. He must not hope for rest. He must go on working and worrying, beginning to be philosophic in his diary, and ending

each entry with scraps, crumbs of hope for his piecemeal schemes. Meanwhile he had better stop writing. He had better leave the book open so that the ink could dry, take up his candle and light himself to bed.

IT HAD PERHAPS BEEN A GOOD THING that the doctor had been called into the Temple so often. The little Princess was ill, and her elders could forget their sorrows in tending her. Marie-Antoinette and Elisabeth spared no pains. They even neglected the Dauphin, in their care for Madame Royale. It was to be rewarded: they not only saved themselves from brooding; they saved the only one of those four lives that had more than a year or so to run.

She could not write to Axel, had not been able to get a letter through to him for many months. She could not write at all: even pencils were forbidden. She knew little of the receding and readvancing tides upon the frontier, nothing of the entertainments and supper-parties in Brussels, nothing of her old friend Mercy D'Argenteau, her unsuspected rival dancing in taffeta at his house. She was a prisoner, a widow and a mother. She sat and sewed with Elisabeth, while Madame Royale, recovered from her sickness, read to them from a book of prayers. She had pinned up her shawl to keep the candlelight from the cot where King Louis XVII lay sleeping the sleep of childhood.

There was a muttering on the stairs, the scraping of feet on well-worn steps of granite. The door swung open, its huge iron studs gleaming dully in the candlelight. Six men entered, six chosen messengers from the Commune of Paris, with tri-colour sashes and the black coats of their class. The foremost cleared his throat, looked at his colleagues for encouragement, and then spoke with eyes averted and unnecessary emphasis.

"We have come by Order of the Assembly," he said. "The Assembly have charged us to announce that they have voted for the separation of Capet's son from his mother."

She lost all control, all knowledge that she had once been Queen. She wept and cringed to them like one whose spirit has been broken in servitude, she screamed and raged at them

like a wounded tigress. She stood before the cot with blazing eyes, daring them, with undignified insults, to force a way past her barrier. The next moment she was on her knees again, sobbing for pity, for an hour or two's grace before they took her child. If she had known to what they were taking him—to the calculated brutality of corruption, the threats of death alternating with the vulgar games, the pints of brandy, the jovial hints at things that make grown men shudder—if she had known all this, she could not have pleaded with them with more abandon, screeched at them with more shameless defiance. They, too, were ignorant of what their hirelings would do. They were for the most part *bons bourgeois*, filled with Republican enthusiasms, incredulous of the filth that gathers, the demon that prowls in the shadow of all enthusiasms. They were embarrassed to the point of resentment, angry at seeing their former Queen transformed into a fish-wife. "Why will you make this scene?" they said. "No one wants to kill your son. Do not oblige us to use force."

They did not need to use force. In an hour her madness had spent itself. She kept them back, but with quieter submission. She herself must lift him from the cot, and dress him for the last time. She herself must unclasp the little hands that still clutched her skirt. When he whimpered and protested, she must use the word that had hardly been used to her since her own childhood, the word whose meaning she was now beginning to re-learn.

"Come, Louis," she said, "we must obey."

EX-POSTMASTER DROUET WAS SADDLING HIS mare in the barrack-square of Mauberge. He was in the Dragoons again, though now he held a commission. His ride through the forest of the Argonne had brought him more than local fame, more than the admiration of a one-horse place like Varennes: he and his neighbours in Ste. Meneshould had always called Varennes the hub of the world . . . because, they said, it went so much slower than the rest. He had no need of such gibes now, having been acclaimed by Paris, true hub of the world, flattered by the National Assembly, sought after (since he was reasonably handsome) by such fine ladies as were of Revolutionary opinion. He had left their arms now, left the Assembly talking, led his dragoons against the enemy that threatened a second time to smother the Revolution under foreign armies. Inexplicably thrown back from Valmy, Austria and Prussia were coming to redeem the tarnished honour of their arms in this next year's campaign. They had flooded France with their thousands, their hundreds of thousands of trained soldiers, and France had few, or none, trained to meet them. They were closing round Mauberge, starving Mauberge of bread and fodder and gunpowder, until another fortnight must witness its surrender. General Francheville, its desperate defender, cried out for help, for volunteers from his own garrison to ride through the Austrian lines and demand help from Paris. Ex-Postmaster Drouet was the first to offer himself and his mare. She had carried him, in the name of Revolution, through the forest of the Argonne and into sleeping Varennes. She must carry him now to Paris, to demand help, to rouse Paris from a more dangerous slumber.

He chose his men, a hundred picked dragoons. He rode out cautiously, through the October fogs, fearing to stumble blindly into Austrian trenches. In half an hour the bullets were whistling round him, the cautious trot turned into an

ungovernable gallop. For all his military caution, he and his men were soon stumbling blindly into Austrian trenches, seeing the whitecoats bob up on every side of them, leap down to kill or capture.

Long months after, when he had had time to think out such a story as would most help the Revolution by throwing discredit on the Austrian aristocrats, Drouet wrote of brutal officers who sabred him as he lay imprisoned by his fallen steed, who kicked him in the stomach and spat insults in his face.

Unfortunately for his cause, fortunately for that of Truth, he had already written an indiscreet letter, still extant, to the Austrian officer who captured him: it was filled with thanks to that honourable gentleman for saving him from the unthinking fury of his soldiers, even for flogging some of them because they had tried to murder a helpless prisoner. Such is, occasionally, the ill-luck of propagandists.

He and his flatterers were not content with so small a lie, such feeble propaganda. They invented an iron cage, in which the champion of Revolution had been barbarously penned. When they had miraculously relieved Mauberge, turned back the Austrian tide, and even recaptured Brussels, they managed to find there an actual cage in which they swore he had been imprisoned. It is not known where they found it, unless they manufactured it themselves, as proof of their unprovable lies: nothing is known about it except that Drouet had never been within its bars. He was led to Brussels, indeed, like the other prisoners of war. He was fed and bandaged and guarded like them, perhaps a little more closely guarded, since the Revolution set such store by him. Meanwhile he was an object of interest to his captors, a sight worth seeing. He had to endure the survey of the sightseers while he chafed in captivity and recovered from his wounds. They were less serious than the wounds he inflicted on himself when he was transferred to an Austrian castle, before his exchange and release, by trying to jump from its window (three hundred feet above the jagged rocks of a Czechoslovakian hillside) with the aid of a parachute that he had constructed from his shredded prison bed-clothes.

All that lay still in the future, in the fantastic future which Revolution and Counter-Revolutionary war were introducing into a humdrum Europe, distrustful of fantasy. Meanwhile he was one of many prisoners-of-war, led under guard to Brussels, and subject to visits from the curious or the indignant.

He could not fail to see the suppressed indignation of one, though he had no means of knowing who he was. He had never seen the handsome foreigner with the delicate eyebrows and suffering face before: he did not know the man whose life-work he had thwarted by that desperate ride through the Argonne. He only saw the hand half-raised in anger, and then dropped again, as the futility of anger became apparent. He may have suspected the tall stranger's identity when Fersen began to question him on the details of Varennes. He prevaricated a little, minimising his own part in the affair, just as he had exaggerated it to the Assembly. Men are men, and prisoners-of-war need not be quixotic heroes. It was harder to minimise the fact that he had been elected to the Assembly, had sat in judgment on King Louis, and joined with those who voted for his death. He had so voted, he said, with slight ambiguity, because he believed it necessary, like the death of Jesus Christ—surely a strange confession, for the apostle of Revolution. He pleaded that, whatever had passed, he had never been lacking in 'respect for Louis'. But he was less ambiguous and a trifle more audacious when he declared that he had helped to kill his King because foreign armies had invaded his country in the Royal name.

Fersen accepted both confession and audacity. What else could one do, with the King already dead, the Queen within an inch of a death as cruel? One could only return to Count Mercy's house, perhaps to Eleanora's unsatisfying embraces, and speculate on the strangeness of man's fate. '*Drouet is six feet tall,*' he noted in his diary that night, '*from thirty-three to thirty-four years old, and quite good-looking, in spite of being a villain.*'

Credibly or incredibly, Mauberge was holding out. Armies, untrained but invincible, were gathering to raise the siege. It was October, and another winter must pass, perhaps another score of winters, before the Austrians could pile arms in the

square before Notre-Dame. And, meanwhile, in the Temple precincts or now in the more dangerous Conciergerie, the Austrian Archduchess, who was widow to France's murdered King, came nearer and nearer to her death.

Fersen was no longer a soldier. Austria and Prussia had their own troops and officers. Frenchmen and ex-colonels of French regiments were not needed, or might be more nuisance than they were worth to those who proclaimed themselves the saviours of France. The *émigrés* were long ago disbanded—to starve or beg charity from petty German princes. A Swedish lover of France was lucky if he still drew a salary from his own King, or an allowance from his grumbling father. The trained armies might close round beleaguered Mauberge, or retreat baffled from its walls. The military machine, ticking off its days in the office files of Berlin and Vienna, was doing all that hide-bound officials demanded it should do. Whether or no a woman perished on a scaffold in distant Paris was nothing to the statisticians who recorded casualties and rations and commissariat. Women, Queens even, were not mentioned in the military manuals, the regulations of self-satisfied Routine.

Fersen made a last effort to rouse the Princes. It was their sister, at least their brother's wife and nephew's mother, who was endangered by the slow impotence of the foreign armies. He found D'Artois in a tent upon the frontier, dictating long-winded despatches to an exhausted Army Clerk. His voice was sharp and querulous, almost as high-pitched as the squeaking of the clerkly pen. He turned in irritation at the interruption, and the irritation was only doubled when he saw who had dared to interrupt.

"Go away," he said. "I've told you already there's nothing to be done."

"If there's nothing to be done," answered Fersen, "it seems a waste of time to dictate despatches. Or are you still hoping for something to come out of nothing?"

"I told you to go away!" said D'Artois peevishly. "You seem to forget that Louis is dead, and that I and my brother are Regents of France. If you were a Frenchman, you'd be my subject. If you are a Swede, you'd better go back to Sweden!"

"I am not going back there," answered Fersen, "while there is a chance of saving the Queen of France. Surely you can do something to make Austria or Prussia put more heart into the war?"

Even the clerk seemed to be listening. His pen was silent for the moment, and D'Artois turned on him in ignoble anger. "Go on with your work!" he said viciously. "You know quite well how I want the Order finished. You can print my usual signature at the bottom—'Charles-Philippe, Regent'. And as for you, Count Fersen. . . Oh, very well, if you won't go away when I tell you, the only thing I can do is to go away myself." He tried to stare Fersen into submission, and, failing miserably, stalked out of the tent into the autumn drizzle.

Fersen smiled bitterly, wondering what new revolutions there might be if ever M. D'Artois became Charles X of France instead of joint Regent of her exiles. He looked round the tent, listened to the rain pattering on its drenched roof. He was alone with the clerk. He was surprised to find himself looking at the man with interest.

There was nothing particularly remarkable or memorable about his face, except a rather high forehead from which the hair was beginning to recede yet further. But Fersen had been trained by his father to keep a good memory for faces, even undistinguished faces. "Am I right in thinking," he asked above the scratching of the pen, "that you were at Yorktown?"

The clerk looked up, surprised to be recognised, surprised to be noticed at all. "Yes, Monsieur," he said, with obvious pleasure. "I was in the tent on the morning of the surrender, when M. De St. Simon was so . . . so emphatic, when M. De La Fayette came in and saw the Red Indian. I do not know how you felt, Monsieur, but the Red Indian was a great experience for me. Strange races, Indian or Chinese or even Gipsy, have always had a fascination for me. Monsieur will pardon my mentioning it."

"But of course! I, too, was interested. I felt just as I felt when I was a little boy at my father's house in the country, and some Lapps passed our way with their reindeer, to pitch their camp a short way from our garden gate. I and my sister went out to see them. There was the same atmosphere, I felt at

Yorktown. I suppose the mere sight of people like that is a lesson to over-civilised people. I know I've never forgotten it." He looked round. "But I've often wondered," he said, "what had happened to some of the men that were with us that morning. St. Simon seems to have disappeared altogether: I suppose the world will never hear of him and his grand schemes again. Berthier's still in the army, I believe, as a Republican officer: I hope he enjoys it. Did you stay in the army until you emigrated?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur!" The clerk seemed surprised again at being taken for a soldier. "I only joined in order to see America. I am afraid I am what they call a Romantic." He began to tickle his cheek with the quill pen. "I left it as soon as we got back," he said. "I've done different things; I was on the stage for a long time, not very successfully. Then I began to write books—just rubbishy romances and plays and novels. But I will not trouble Monsieur with all that."

"I don't mind being troubled," answered Fersen. "I've nothing much to do, and I'm interested in anyone who has joined. . . . I take it you joined to fight—or write—for the King?"

"Yes, Monsieur. I was hoping to fight, but they made me a clerk, because of my novels. Writing Army orders and trying to make them grammatical, until I found that War and Grammar won't mix. That went on until we were disbanded last autumn. Austria and Prussia had their own troops, and couldn't be bothered to keep regiments of *émigrés* on foot. The others were turned off to starve. I suppose I was lucky to keep my place. They had made me lacquey to the Regimental Surgeon, and the Austrians drafted me and him across into their artillery. I write prescriptions and indentures for bandages, when I'm not making his bed or polishing his boots. And sometimes the Princes asked me to make up a letter, or even a minor proclamation, that really mattered. There was one about the disbandment of our Regiment. The Princes signed it . . . but that is a long time ago. I was rather proud of it at the time. I remember I felt hurt when nobody read it."

Fersen fidgeted on his camp-stool. He felt obscurely irritated with this writer of prescriptions and minor pro-

clamations. But he was sufficiently interested to make a show of sympathy.

"You find all this very irksome?" he asked, with a gesture towards the heaped table. "I suppose you are as unhappy as most of them? You're cursing the hour you joined?"

The clerk evaded the second question, but there was something in his face which seemed to indicate that, with his curious world in ruins round him, he was not unhappy. "Irksome? But yes," he said. "All these letters and reports that can do nothing except cumber those that want to fight . . . in order to flatter those who only want to feel important. But I shall never regret that I joined. It has been an experience, Monsieur. I sometimes feel that, if ever I get back to writing again, if ever anyone wants to read novels again, mine won't be quite so rubbishy as they were before I . . . before . . ."

He had drawn a creased and soiled paper from his pocket, was glancing over it and wondering whether to show it to Fersen, fearing to seem presumptuous.

"Is that the proclamation you were telling me about?" asked Fersen. "The one you were proud of?"

The ex-novelist looked up with something akin to gratitude in his eyes. "Yes, Monsieur," he said. "It was only an unimportant matter—just a regiment of exiles being disbanded. And as to being proud . . . well, I still think the third sentence . . . But as I say, it's a year ago now, and no one took any notice."

"May I see it?" asked Fersen. It was true that he had nothing to do at the moment, was wondering what he was going to do with the long years that might lie ahead of him, penned in the iron cage of bitter memories and of a life emptied of its meaning. Meanwhile he might help a fellow-creature, if only by encouraging his vanity for the moment.

The dirty scrap of print was handed over with something like eagerness. It was dated November 23rd, 1792, and signed by Provence and D'Artois. One would have known, without being told, that it was not of D'Artois' composition. 'Messieurs,' it ran:

'MESSIEURS,—

'Since the beginning of our misfortunes, nothing that has happened to us has been so painful as the situation wherein now we lie.

'The Powers, whose benefactions, whose efforts to further our Cause, must never be forgotten amongst us, now demand, if only for the moment, our separation and the laying-down of our arms.

'We speak to the whole body of the Nobility, to the loyal soldiers of the Army, to Frenchmen who have sacrificed everything for Honour, for their attachment to their Religion, for their love to their King: we will not do such men the injustice of recommending Courage under Adversity . . .'

"Yes," said Fersen pensively, "that is a good sentence. But I do not think you should be discouraged. Even if M. D'Artois signed it without reading, even if no one has congratulated you on it, there may be hundreds who were grateful for the thought. And once a thing's in print, you never know what may happen. It may hang about for a century or more, and then someone may pick up a copy in an old junk-shop . . . someone, shall we say, in the same position as yourself? Not necessarily a Frenchman, but a lover of France in some foreign army. He might even be an Army Clerk, finding his work as irksome as you do, as cumbering to the fighters he had hoped to join. And he will feel himself in touch with you, without knowing your name. He may even quote your words to his uninterested friends. He may put them on the title-page of some rubbishy novel; he may be writing one, after finishing his clerk work (or putting it off on to others), while the guns of some future war boom round him in the night-time."

SHE WAS NEVER ALONE. THE DUNGEON WAS roughly divided into two by an erection that was half a partition, half a screen of the same coarse canvas as was nailed over the damp and running walls. Behind it, day or night, there must always be two *gendarmes* who could look over or round it to see what their Queen was doing. A few of the men who took turn and turn about, obeyed their instructions and harassed her with watching eyes; most simply sat talking in low tones, smoking their short clays and playing their interminable *picquet*. There were two men particularly, Prud'homme and young Lamarche, who dared to show her kindness, and even respect. There were the pathetic, the simple-minded, among gaolers or sweepers, who were constantly reprimanded in her presence for some consideration shown. Some, not so simple-minded, proved more cunning than the bullies: the man who nailed up an old piece of carpet over the canvas, to keep the damp and chill from her bed-head, swore solemnly it was to deaden the sound in case she tried to shout to other prisoners in the passage.

But there were presences harder to bear than that of the *gendarmes*. There was the constant stream of the officious, the nondescripts who came in to see that this or that precaution against conspiracy had been taken, this or that humiliation enforced. There was Fouquier-Tinville, Public Prosecutor to the Republic—exercising his voice all day to bawl or insinuate the innocent to their doom, sitting up all night in the silence and solitude of his room with to-morrow's ghastly sheaf of documents—who yet found time to intrude upon her, search her poor little store of linen in the one cardboard box she was allowed for wardrobe, turn her out of bed even, to run shaking fingers over her sheets, though he could hardly have said for what he searched. He seldom left the Conciergerie, the Porter's Lodge, as they quaintly called that vast pile: it was both prison and judgment-hall and stabling for the tumbrils that

called Madeleine Fouché: she had no connection and less resemblance to the unclean fox that was her namesake. She found her way into the dungeon more than once. The first time, the Queen seemed cold beyond the possibility of melting; too many enemies had come with soft step and seeming-kindly smile: even the girl's present of fresh linen might have been brought in guile, her fruit and jam might be poisoned. It was a long time before Madeleine could convince the Queen of her good intention; and at her second coming, all was for a moment undone, when there entered behind her a tall young man in the uniform of the National Guard. It was only for a moment. She looked into his eyes and saw that he was no militiaman but a priest who had donned the hated garments as disguise; beneath them, or hidden in those swinging side-pockets, he carried the proof of his true vocation, the symbol of his Faith. It was thus, and thus fantastically, that masquerade entered for the last time into the life of Queen Marie-Antoinette.

She would still have turned from him if he had been one of those priests who had accepted the slavery of the State, sworn the oath of those who sought to serve God and Mammon. But he was of the hunted and haunted, the hiders in attic or cellar, the men who bore their lives in their hands, in a city where church-bells were silenced save for riot or alarm. He was of broad and muscular frame, lean-faced with deep-set eyes. Christ meant more to him than a sickly picture, encouraging weak and comforting thoughts. Prud'homme and Lamarche were on guard: Madeleine Fouché had seen to that. She could help young Father Magnin, ex-curé of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, to lay out his bread and wine on the table. She had even contrived to borrow two candles from the gaoler's wife. When all was ready for the ceremony, Marie-Antoinette hesitated to take first place: the priest insisted that it must be so, if not because she was Queen, then because she was in the deadliest danger. And the two *gendarmes*, leaving their cards and pipes, knelt beside her at his improvised altar.

IT HAD BEEN HOT AND STIFLING when first they brought her to the Conciergerie, though even in August its

stones ran wet with damp. It was perishingly cold before she left her dungeon, for October was half done when they found courage to bring her to her trial. The prison doctor had ordered her removal to some healthier confinement, but no one attended to his warning; it might be better to let her die thus than to defy Europe by sending her to the scaffold.

She did not die, and they must go through with the dreadful mockery. Fouquier-Tinville must sit up all night with the long tale of her life—intrigue with Austria, Diamond Necklaces and fouler scandals than that. One accusation—the only one that mattered—was too just to need any slanders to support or weaken it. She was to die because she had made war against the Revolution. She was to die because she had let war loose upon the people of France.

It was not difficult to find twelve men a little bolder, a little more sodden than those who daily obeyed Fouquier's orders to send thirty or forty fellow-creatures to the death so few had merited. He summoned her to confront them at eight in the morning. He denounced her till four, gave respite for an hour, and then denounced until four came round again. For nineteen hours she sat watching the plumes nod on Fouquier's ridiculous head-dress—the Henry-of-Navarre hat with the tricolour cockade pinned inappropriately on the upturned brim—or stood to make answer to the never-ending train of witnesses. She had Counsel, two lawyers—though both were arrested for favouring her cause before sentence was pronounced. One, Chauveau-Lagarde, made no concealment of his favour, prompting and encouraging her boldest stroke. When she looked downcast after it, whispered to him: "Did I do wrong? I've just heard someone saying that I look proud," he whispered back the only possible answer: "Be yourself, Madame, and you can never be wrong". She had some cause for pride at that instant. They had just launched the filthiest of their slanders, the unthinkable accusation that she had corrupted, had taken delight in corrupting, her little son of six. Some vipers are so poisonous that they hurt no one except themselves; but, even unhurt, she could take credit for finding the right words to answer. "Against such witness," she said, "I appeal to every mother in the room."

Chauveau-Lagarde did not take the full measure of her courage until the hour of sentence, in the sleepless morning watch. She had thanked him for his efforts, hoped he was not too tired. When they laid hands on him in arrest, took him to the far corner of the hall, she sat waiting while the twelve held their short debate. But when sentence was pronounced, he could see the effect upon her. He left witness that she was neither indignant nor afraid. But, strange as it seemed to one who had not been shuttered from the world since August, the sentence came to her as a surprise. Up to that moment she had hoped.

SHE HAD LITTLE TIME AFTER the pronouncement of the sentence. It would be read to her again in six hours, in her cell, before they took her to the tumbril. She spent some of them on her knees, some of them writing. She wrote to Elisabeth, and in words so exalted, so unlike all that she had written as girl or Queen or even hope-racked prisoner, that there were many to deny her hand and scent a pious forgery.

"It is to you, sister, that I write for the last time. I have just been sentenced—not to a shameful death; shame is only for the guilty. I am going to join your brother; I am as innocent as he was: I hope to be as brave in the presence of death . . ."

The pen travelled fast. There was so much to say to Elisabeth, and, through Elisabeth, to " . . . my poor children, for whom alone I have gone on existing . . ."

There were blots on the paper, of ink but not of tears. She had never been skilful with her pen, but she suffered no more. Already, when she had slipped and bruised herself on the stairs of the Conciergerie, she had said to those who ran to soothe her: "No need. Nothing can hurt me now".

She was still writing when the grey dawn broke, and the huge building began to stir to its strange life. Fouquier would be up already, the Queen almost forgotten, his new batch of victims awaiting his venom. Others might have to

wait a week, a month, before they saw his sharp face beneath the nodding plumes. All over the vast maze of the Conciergerie, and in the dozen choked gaols of Revolutionary Paris, prisoners were awakening to meet another day. They were out in the court-yards, scrubbing their linen at the fountain. They were tossing in fever on the noisome mattresses of over-crowded cells. They were singing and laughing and cracking their jokes. They were dressing and shaving with unusual care, because a gaoler had told them that they would to-day be riding to the scaffold behind a tumbril that bore their Queen. They were even reciting Tragedy, practising their art to prison walls: half the *Comédie Française* were in prison, having defied an order to act no play that might remind Paris of forbidden glories. Naudet had escaped to Switzerland, after trying to cut off a promising Republican and one of the greatest actors of all time, by fighting a duel with young Talma. But most of the rest were there. The *soubrette*, Mademoiselle Contat, had retired into a corner with pencil and paper. Champrille was practising the fight in *The Siege of Calais* with a broom-handle. But Fleury, who had made a success as Frederick the Great in *The Two Pages*, and now played Tragedy Tyrants, was walking up and down, declaiming from Corneille:

“ ‘Beneath my sway, behold a world in fee:
On land supreme, supreme on every sea.’ ”

His colleagues were at least free from their late masters, the Court officials who had ruled the *Comédie* with so arbitrary a rod. Someone could interrupt Fleury's display of his Art by shouting the parody that had once been whispered against them in the wings of the theatre:

‘Beneath our sway behold the stage reduced,
Actors dismissed, and actresses seduced . . .’

The company laughed the Tyrant down; and within earshot of their laughter, husbands were taking a last farewell of their wives, children wept in the laps of mothers they would never see again.

They were writing, too, even as their Queen wrote; they were writing farewell letters that would never be delivered, wills bequeathing property that the Republic had already seized, rhymed epitaphs for themselves, who must lie heaped in rough trenches in the suburbs, with no stone on which to scratch a name. Mademoiselle Contat's pencil was working upon one that has survived the wreckage of a century, telling posterity how a *soubrette* once laughed at death.

'My entrance cue. The scaffold there,
Is but a stage to show my Art.
Citizen Executioner
Can kill, not put me off my part.
I tread the path where Royalty,
Valour and Childhood's grace have been;
This is the new Equality
Under the knife of the Guillotine.'

She was to escape that Equality: her papers never reached Fouquier-Tinville: the day before her trial was ordered, they were rolled into little pellets and flicked out into the Seine by an unsuccessful comedian who had found a post in the Bureau of Justice, and used it to save hundreds of lives, at risk of his own, apart from those of his fellow-actors. There was no such unexpected saviour for most of the writers of wills and farewells and epitaphs. Their courage and their Christianity were tried more sorely. Death was waiting for the woman who had been Louis XV's mistress, the poor Dubarry, dragged from her charities to country neighbours and losing all courage on the scaffold. Death was waiting for the obscure Christian who was writing his will and bequeathing money to the man that had denounced him to Fouquier: the tell-tale was poor, 'and probably he has not been paid what was promised him'.

There were many others that wrote, with death to hasten and sharpen their pens. Young Barnave was writing, though it was a letter that had betrayed him to imprisonment and death; the Queen he had so strangely loved had concealed his long letters, his lectures on politics, smuggled them out to Fersen, and so to the distant castle of Löfvstad, where they

now rest; but King Louis had left one of his notes behind in a drawer in the ruined Tuileries, and so brought death upon the writer. Barnave sat writing a last letter to his sister, while he awaited his summons.

'I am still young, but have already experienced all the good and evil of which human life is compounded. I had imagination and believed in illusions. I am undeceived now. I die regretting nothing but friendship. That, in all its sweetness, I have tasted to the full.'

There was one who could not write, though long after, as an old lady in England, she managed to dictate dazed and disappointing memoirs of her ghastly experiences. Maria Grossholz (not yet Madame Tussaud) was not under sentence, but she had been so closely connected with monarchy that she must do as she was told or be lost. She waited in agony for the evening when the Queen's severed head—for the almost more terrible evening when Madame Elisabeth's utterly innocent one—would be tossed into her lap so that she could make a waxen record for the Republic's Chamber of Horrors.

There was one who would write nothing, say nothing, give away no secret. Philip-Equality, once Duc D'Orléans, waited in prison for the fate to which he had already sent his Royal cousin. His silence set the seal upon the mystery of his whole life. He would die without revealing whether he had been the principal and deliberate agent in opening the sluices to the revolutionary floods that had at last caught and overwhelmed him, or whether he was the victim of courtly slander, uninterested in the throne he was supposed to have coveted, interested only in jockeys and Freemasons and young ladies whose morals were more than free. Innocent or guilty, he must pay the price for Revolution, within a month of the woman he had once grossly courted and then grossly slandered, the woman who believed him as much her murderer as her husband's.

MARIE-ANTOINETTE HAD FINISHED HER LETTER, with its last message to her children, its final resolve to be content with Father Magnin's ministrations, and speak no word to such half-priest as the Republic might provide.

They would not let her wear her widow's black, lest the spectacle should excite pity in the streets. She had to change them with a young police official standing over her: when she asked him, for decency's sake, to turn his back, he answered that he must follow his instructions and watch. The needless sentence was read again. A tall man entered, six foot and more: he told her to hold out her hands, and, when she protested that her husband had gone unbound to death, roped them with rough violence that made her cry aloud. Then he cut off her hair: the knife with which Doctor Guillotin had hoped to diminish the sufferings of mankind was sufficiently blunted by forty necks a day, without the toughness of hair. Then they led her out of the cell, dressed in white, down the passage and past the dingy office where incomings and outgoings were noted in the ledger. Beyond was the court-yard, the waiting tumbril with a little ladder for her to climb. It was not long past ten, and the sixteenth of October. In another fortnight she would have been thirty-eight.

It is as well to remember, as they drove her through the streets, with another ex-actor to ride before her, waving a sabre and encouraging the crowd to heap insults on the defenceless—past M. D'Orléans' Palais Royal, past the Tuileries, to the spot where her Switzers had died—it is as well to remember that nothing could hurt her any more.

EPILOGUE

THE CONQUEROR

THE BRIDE

MIDDLE-CLASS

THE WITNESS

TIME HAD NO MEANING NOW, AND ALL PLACES were the same: Axel von Fersen would never find Marie-Antoinette again, in any time or place. His father had died, leaving him riches and honours, and responsibilities that he coped with through a mist of unreality. His King, the son of his King, sent him abroad to speak for Sweden, and could hardly blame him if Sweden's voice counted for little in the counsels of a strange new world.

He was in Germany again, in Rastadt instead of Aachen. There was no card-playing now, no King Gustav to bewilder opponents with finesse and ruff, or conceal his own revokings under tricks that his enemies called sharp practice. Card-sharper or hero, there had been a courtliness in King Gustav as well as a kindly heart. Over his murdered corpse, the politics of Europe were growing more ruthless and more violent: the smell of blood from the guillotine was now drowned in the reek from the battlefields and prison-camps, the smouldering hayricks and gutted farms of Europe. If the fighting and devastation had died down for a moment, if the bewildered leaders met at Rastadt to patch up a peace, it would be a peace dictated by the insolence of the victorious soldiers, pregnant with the seeds of a more frightful war.

There was no one to gainsay the principal victor, the Corsican who had tamed the Revolution in order to march it through a plundered Italy, driving the Austrian whitecoats back into their mountains. He dreamt now of destroying England, perhaps by invasion, perhaps by wrenching down her dominion of the East. Italy and Austria could be settled in a fortnight. The German princelings who had toadied to Austria for a century, or rebelled against her nominal empire, must now toady to France and accept a new map of their country from the Dictator.

He did not bring the actor Talma to Rastadt, as he brought him to Erfurt, to act *Brutus* before an audience of Kings. He

was his own leading actor, dominating an audience of obsequious ministers and hesitant ambassadors. He left them waiting a fortnight for his entrance, wondering what tragedies were in store, as they sat and gossiped in the old castle of Rastadt, while the winds of November howled through the fir-trees of the Black Forest and lashed the distant waters of the Rhine. Then he stepped briefly upon the stage, to decree that the Low Countries must be swallowed up in France, that half Italy must be a patchwork of petty Republics under French dominion, that Austria could lick her wounds and content herself by annexing Venice, that most ancient of Republics, recently extinguished by his arms, which had 'held the gorgeous East in fee' before ever an English ship had made conquest in the Mediterranean. Men might grieve, English poets might grieve, but 'that which once was great' had no place in the new Europe of the Dictator.

He had plans, too, for Germany, not yet conquered, but powerless to resist dictation. Sweden had claimed a vote in German geography, had claimed it ever since Gustavus the Great smashed through all German frontiers with his armies, though this, as General Bonaparte sneered with some justice, was ' . . . going back rather a long way'. Gustavus' namesake and successor, his obstinate young Majesty, Gustav Adolf IV, decreed that Sweden should speak to General Bonaparte through the mouth of her well-beloved Count Hans Axel von Fersen, ex-ambassador at the Court of France, Knight-Designate of the Order of the Seraphim, Chancellor-Designate of the ancient and learned University of Upsala. No meeting could be more fruitless, but Kings must be obeyed, however inappropriate their choice.

There was less ceremony about congresses these days, though as much waiting about as ever. When Fersen had at last penetrated into the heart of Rastadt Castle, he found himself still in an ante-room, lit by Gothic arrow-slits, with no Conqueror present to receive him. No one was there except a staff officer, all plumes and tricolour sashes, bent over a map at the folding desk which suggested tents rather than mediæval masonry. He was muttering the unwieldy names of petty German towns.

"Gelsenkirchen," murmured Marshal Berthier to himself, "Donaueschingen-im-Schwarzwald. . . . Hullo, it's you!"

The greeting was strained on both sides. There was a little talk of old times in America, but no cordiality. Berthier was simple-minded; he had learnt lately that one's military career can be impeded by too much familiarity with old friends, and the fifteen years' gap since their last meeting seemed to loom as wide as a century's.

Fersen could not help remarking on it, wondering how such gaps can so swiftly open. Berthier took him literally. "The Revolution?" he said. "He has explained all that to us several times. Only a question of sifting his opinions, consolidating his opinions, so to speak." Fersen noticed that 'he' and 'his' were spoken with such reverence as might become a Vizier awaiting the arrival of the Grand Turk.

"A woman I knew," said Fersen, "once said that it was all the result of Fear. And she was in a position to judge, better than many." He spoke wistfully, remembering the Queen.

"No. Oh no," said Berthier with prim dogmatism. "He once said that it was all caused by Vanity—the *amour-propre* of the middle classes, you know, wounded by the old aristocratic System. A little difficult to reconcile that with two other things he told us; still, he knows. He said that the Monarchy was destroyed by that business of the Diamond Necklace, and another time he told Auguste De Staël, Madame De Staël's son, that her father had caused the Revolution."

Fersen turned away with a slight smile. It was odd to be reminded of Germaine, whose career was far from done. She had earned a momentary gratitude from him by begging Robespierre and Danton for the life of Marie-Antoinette. She had more recently awakened his bewildered contempt by including a murderer among her many bedfellows, the exiled Count Ribbing of accursed memory. General Bonaparte was now finding her a nuisance; it would be amusing if the man who could conquer and settle Europe found no way of settling Germaine de Staël.

Fersen glanced towards the door, expelling fruitless memories. "Will the General be long?" he asked.

The General would not be long. There was a burst of sound

from next door, an angry voice shouting as one might shout at grenadiers on parade. Then an apologetic Italian backed his way into the room, and his pursuer stood on the threshold with bright eyes and still hollow cheeks.

"You can tell whoever sent you," he said, as he strode into the room, "that I am signing no pardon for Rebels. Yes, I said Rebels! I have given Italy her liberty. Those who attempt to disturb my temporary occupation are rebelling against their own freedom. . . . Here, give me the copy of my instructions!"

He marched up to Berthier, flung the papers on the table in every direction, and picked one out.

Fersen stood still and in silence. It was not for him to demand attention or courtesy from the Conqueror.

Napoleon's eye ran rapidly down the paragraphs of his own hasty handwriting.

"The first is about the Lion of St. Mark," he said, half to himself, "and the stone horses. I'm having 'em sent to France. No, this is what I was looking for. . . . *'If France discovers that these are men who (whatever their motives) do not conduct themselves as she has the right to expect, it may be necessary, pending the conclusion of the first Treaty, to take rigorous measures. France has not completely renounced the rights of a conqueror'.*"

He seemed to linger a moment on his own words, and handed the paper back to Berthier in silence. "My instructions to my Chief of Staff," he said quietly, but with the quietness that preceded danger. "You know perfectly well what 'rigorous measures' means. It means firing-parties, the gallows if necessary, and no pardons at any prince's request. Now be off with you!"

He stared the man out of the room, grunted with satisfaction, and then turned to see that it was the Ambassador of Sweden who stood waiting with pursed lips. He stamped across at Fersen, examining him as one might examine a curiosity, while Berthier made brief and formal introduction. Fersen bowed with such courtliness as he could command, but Napoleon seemed merely to sniff.

"Good morning, Citizen Count!" he said. He still kept the Revolutionary jargon and addressed letters to an Indian

Rajah with 'Citizen Tippoo'. Then he broke in upon Fersen's courtesies with a drum-fire of questions that were meant to wound.

He could make nothing of courtesies, except report them to his titular masters of the Republic as 'the monkey-tricks of the old *Cœil-de-Bœuf*'. He could also report to the Government he was about to overthrow, that he had put Fersen in a quandary by asking who was now accredited to Paris as Swedish ambassador. He knew there was none and could bark "Why not?" with intolerant triumph. "France and Sweden are old allies," he said. "They should be allies still—against the ambition of Austria, against another Power that Sweden will soon find dangerous." The word 'ambition' fell strangely from his lips, and he seemed to hesitate a moment when he spoke of Prussia. Valmy had been fought, but not yet Jena.

His anger was rising, and he grew insolent. "How can there be any alliance," he asked, "while the Swedish King sends envoys whose persons are distasteful to every citizen of France? Would he like us to send Republican agitators, regicides to Stockholm?"

The Republic had done so already, if not to Stockholm, at least to capitals nearer and more easily cowed. But the Republic, with Bonaparte as its General, could afford such inconsistencies. He was not only its General; he was its incarnation, the logical outcome of its Revolution. He had tamed the Great Beast with his grapeshot, but Fersen saw in him the personification of its callousness, its violence, its vulgarity. The breath that had stifled Marie-Antoinette, the claws from which he had tried in vain to save her, were now menacing Europe in the person of a hot-tempered tyrant, stamping round a room in an ancient castle and shouting abuse at the representative of the Old Order whose memory was still a threat to the more sterile Empire he was putting in its place. "No, sir, no!" he stormed. "France will not have men like you meddling with her future! We have now shaken off the slumber of centuries and become the Leading People of the World; we cannot suffer the approach of those who have *liaisons* with our humiliating past! Your presence here is an insult to our dignity."

There was nothing to be done, nothing that any man could do. Fersen could only walk to the door, bow to the tight-lipped Berthier and pass out with '*liaison*' ringing in his ears. And, lest the arrow had missed, the archer must send a heavier, blunter one before the door could close. "Tell your King," he shouted, "not to send me men that have slept with Marie-Antoinette!"

He turned to Berthier for the applauding smile. Then he snatched up the map, glanced at it a moment and threw it down again.

"Get me one of Egypt," he said, "and a large one of Asia. The best way to get at London is to go through Cairo, and maybe Calcutta!"

He stumped back to his own room. He had not heard of Sidney Smith, and he had perhaps forgotten for the moment that the road to Calcutta lay through Syria, through the little town of Acre.

COUNT HANS AXEL VON FERSEN, ex-minister-plenipotentiary to the Congress of Rastadt, emerged into the November evening, walked pensively to his waiting carriage, and raised a hand to pat his horse's neck. If Time and Place had little meaning now, Insults had less. It was something, perhaps, to see that the new order should be stirred to such anger, as though it still feared the memory of a more gracious Past. He was the witness to that graciousness, might carry on its memory to those who heard it daily slandered or ridiculed. A poor part to play, a poor *finale* to five acts of hope and devotion and undeserved defeat. But, by God's grace, the curtain might be falling soon.

The horse dipped its head, clinking the harness. Fersen ran his hand along its mane, and patted the warm neck: that at least was tangible, and even comforting to the touch.

"I hope they're getting plenty of oats this cold weather," he said to his driver. "We've a long journey ahead, though there's no need to hurry over it. We can start back for Sweden to-morrow."

II

"WHAT'S BROUGHT YOU ROUND SO EARLY, MY DEAR?"

Sophie, grey-haired and wrinkled, sat up in her curtained bed at Blasieholm and looked across the untidy room at Emily De Geer standing in the doorway. "Not that you aren't welcome," she said, as her morning visitor evaded her question, "so long as you don't mind shutting that door and watching me get up and dress. I don't take long these days. I'm an old woman now, and no one notices what I look like." She moved the breakfast-tray carefully from her lap, drew her still shapely feet out of bed, and shuffled them into soft woollen slippers. "It's going to be fine again," she said, walking unsteadily to the window to look out over the sparkling water. "It's almost hot already. And as soon as I've dressed, my dear, I'll take you along to the library, so that you can see your Uncle Axel before he goes out for this silly procession. I suppose that *is* what you came round for, you funny little lovesick one! Well, you must just wait till I've done my hair. And in case you've come to talk confidences, I'll do it myself, without calling the maid. So don't say your old aunt isn't kind to you. I hate doing my own hair!"

"Let me do it," said Emily. "Put that wrap round you before you sit down. It may be June, but there's no need to catch colds, sitting by an open window in your nightgown!"

Emily was near forty now, but the early promise of beauty had been amply fulfilled, and there was as yet no sign of its withering. She was as fresh and lovely as ever; she was kindly and free from pride: she was rich and of ancient lineage. She was still unmarried. A slight shadow flitted across her face when Sophie spoke to her of 'Uncle' Axel.

She stood behind the chair, wielding the silver-mounted brush upon the sparse coils of Sophie's grey hair, while her own, golden and abundant, shone gloriously in the morning sunlight above her white brow and deep blue eyes. "And when

Madame's *coiffure* is attended to," she said, parodying the lady's-maid with over-refined accents, "perhaps Madame will be so good as to tell me which dress to prepare for Madame's visit to the Library."

"Oh, the black, Susan, the black!" answered Sophie, taking up the game. "How many times am I to tell you that I am at Court now, and must follow the Chamberlain's rulings? You'll find it hanging in my wardrobe there."

They laughed softly at each other's faces in the mirror. There seemed no hint of jealousy between them, only that rare love for a third person that can unite more than it divides.

"I shan't come with you," said Emily. "I don't want to see Axel to-day. I know you two can't take me seriously, I know you can't believe I really want..." She stepped back a moment, out of range of the looking-glass, as if to admire her handiwork. "But I did think that to-day would have been a good day. Even the weather has turned out right. But, of course, if Axel is superstitious about it——"

Sophie turned round in her chair, and then stood up to take the younger woman in her arms. "We *do* take you seriously," she said impulsively, "even if the rest of Stockholm won't believe it. They would, if they knew Axel as well as I do. You're not a schoolgirl any longer, and Axel isn't much over . . . isn't so very old. And it's time. . . . Oh, Emily, it's more than time he had a little happiness again!"

"I was hoping"—Emily was not far from tears now—"I was hoping I could give him some. I know I could be happy with him; we could all three be happy together. That is, if——"

"If what?"

"Nothing. It's only . . . But I may be just silly to worry about it at all. It was why I came round. I told you I didn't want to see Axel to-day, on the day that I was hoping to marry him. But I was going to ask you to give him a warning. It was just a silly placard someone pasted up in the street last night. And as I came round here, there was another one, right opposite your front door. But I don't suppose it matters."

"Of course it doesn't." Sophie gave her a final squeeze and turned to open the wardrobe door. "If we read all the silly placards they put up nowadays, and thought they mattered,

we should go mad! What you really mean, Miss Emily De Geer, is that you wanted an excuse to come round and look in at Blasieholm, even if you pretend you won't see Axel to-day! And now I've found you out, and you're coming with me to the Library as soon as I've got into these widow's weeds. By the way, I'm glad I'm not his widow, or anyway his wife."

"Whose?"

"Prince August, of course. This is Court mourning for him. I suppose he was good-natured, and all that, and he made himself popular in Stockholm—that was only policy, if he was going to be King here. But he had the brains of a prize bull, and his face . . . well, you saw him when he came here. No wonder he had apoplexy! That funny General Skjöldebrand described his complexion exactly. He said it was like red paint smeared over black."

Emily was silent a moment. "Aren't you being rather a cat?" she asked at last. "The poor man's dead now, and as you say, he was a good-natured creature. I don't think it was only policy that made him visit hospitals and orphanages and things. I think he really wanted to do good."

"I suppose you're right, dear," said Sophie. "Yes, I need a scolding. I'm sorry. But I never could bear the thought of him living at Haga where King Gustav used to live, sitting on the throne at Riksdags like a piece of good-natured beef-steak, while the House of Shopkeepers lectured him on what good little kings should do to help trade! Sorry, I'm being catty again, and as you say, he's dead. I wonder who on earth Duke Carl . . . King Carl, I mean, will adopt in place of him."

She was deftly donning her black as she chattered, searching for rouge on the dressing-table, outlining her faded eyebrows with a little pencil. Emily had fallen silent, sitting on the dishevelled bed with a little cloud on her forehead.

"Do you know," went on Sophie, "I believe King Carl is getting a little jealous of us. Of course he's terribly polite to Axel and me. But you know what King Carl is; you never know what he's thinking behind the politeness. He's as stiff as ever, but I believe he envies us our money and the way we use it. Father, after his annual ruin, left Axel far more than I

imagined he would, and then there's all the Taube money that poor Evert left me. Blasieholm dinners and balls are becoming as splendid as ever they were, if only we could find the right sort of people to invite nowadays!"

"If I marry . . ." began Emily. "When I marry Axel, I shall have a talk to you and him about that. I can't believe it's very wise to make a King jealous, to say nothing of other people . . . hundreds of people. It's a long time now since anybody was admired for spending money freely. As you say, one's envied."

"Let them envy!" answered Sophie brightly. "I've never known people do anything else. One can't be happy without crowds of people being unhappy because they've not been as lucky as you. The only thing to do with that kind of person is just to ignore him. You don't really think there's any danger, do you, in the kind of talk that goes about now? I've known the same kind of thing, or other things just as silly, all my life: but I've always ignored them, and I seem to have survived."

Her movements were still light and deft; her voice, even as she pronounced the word 'danger', had still the old confident ring. But though she would never have confessed it, there was a little finger of fear fumbling coldly at her heart.

"I don't know what to think," answered Emily, sitting motionless on the bed. "But when you say you've known the same thing all your life . . . well, Sophie, I sometimes wonder if you realise how much the world has changed since you were . . . since we were at Ljung, and played hide-and-seek in the stables. Revolutions and wars and . . ."

"Well, we've had no Revolution in Sweden," Sophie almost snapped the words out, as though to put a sharp end to fumbings. "And it's peacetime now. No more wars under the reign of King Carl the Cautious, King Carl with the vinegar face. Or do you think he's planning a civil one, to make people forget he's had to lick the boots of the Russians? He's certainly brought enough troops into Stockholm to line the road for the funeral of his adopted heir! Is that only the tyrant's crafty excuse for massing the forces of Jealousy and giving Blasieholm over to siege and pillage?"

"No." Emily smiled wanly. "Sophie dear, you talk such a

lot of nonsense, and you're so . . . so brave about ignoring things, that I sometimes wonder— No, I suppose I'm being silly again. But when you said that, about Sweden never having had its Revolution . . . and then again about the war. No nation likes to see its King licking anyone's boots. No nation likes to lose half its territory, that's been ours since . . . Heaven knows how long Finland has been Swedish! And when their vanity's been hurt, and they don't know who's the right person to blame, or know and can't get their fingers on him—well, don't you think they might turn on the wrong one, just so's to feel they can still hurt someone? That's what I've been afraid of lately. But, as I say, I may be being silly."

"You're certainly being very depressing," said Sophie, as she finished her toilet and turned to confront Emily. "I don't know what's wrong with you this morning, you seem so determined to croak. Or is it just disappointment because Axel refused to be married to you to-day? Not that he could have, now. He's got to go and look solemn at this wretched procession. But I'm certainly not going to take you to the Library, even if you wanted to come. Axel gets depressed enough as it is, and I won't have him croaked at, this hour of the morning!"

"I expect you're right, Sophie dear." Emily rose from the bed. "I expect I'd better be going now. Only if you wouldn't mind warning him. . . . No, I won't even say that. I'll just say good-bye till to-morrow. I'm sure everything will seem quite different to-morrow."

They kissed, and Emily gathered up her things for departure. "I can tell you one thing," said Sophie as she rang for servants, grandly-liveried servants, to show her visitor to the door in state—"I can tell you that it's never any good warning Axel of anything. It never was, even when it was a question of guillotines or a firing party of Jacobin soldiers. He's still the same old Axel, you know."

EMILY FOUND HER MAID AT THE DOOR. They had walked to Blasieholm in the cool air of early morning. Now the sun was beginning to beat down on the roofs and wharves of

Stockholm. Though it was only a half-mile from her home, she was almost wishing she had a carriage to take her back through the blazing streets. She stopped by the placard on the wall outside, and ran a listless eye over its print.

She felt inexplicably tired, and vaguely anxious. Her thoughts were on Sophie and Axel. She wondered whether Sophie had gone straight to the Library, or whether she had household business to attend to first. She pictured brother and sister together, both clad in official mourning, and wondered what they were saying to each other. As she did so, there was a loud pawing and rattling behind her. Axel's six horses came trotting into sight from the stables, drawing his gilded coach. Their cream-coloured flanks glistened in the sunshine, their manes tossed trimly as they stepped. If Axel was ever melancholy, ever inclined to neglect anything, it would not be his horses.

Emily saw the old coachman bring them to a stop by the front door, say something to the footmen who ran beside the coach, and disappear indoors. She noticed that he had clutched a newspaper in his gnarled fingers—the *Nya Post*, by the look of it. She wondered why he should be taking so unlikely a handful in at his master's front door. She turned again to read the print on the wall, the incredible 'DEATH TO POISONERS', with its sequel of lies and hate. She glanced back at the house; but the Library, where the coachman might now be closeted with his master, looked out on the far side towards the water and King Carl's palace.

It was at that moment, in the passage of her parent's home, that the old lady in black paused listening on the threshold.

III

"FOXES? WHAT HAVE FOXES TO DO WITH IT?"

General Anders Skjöldebrand, breakfasting at a little Kaffee-Hus in the Lästmakare Gata, looked up from the newspaper to the waitress who was leaning over his table and pointing with a greasy thumb to the article she insisted he must read. It was headed THE FABLE OF THE FOXES, and the good General had already found in it as many lies and vile insinuations as could be got into a few inches of print.

"That's them exactly, to my way of thinking," said the woman. "A couple of foxes. And maybe the sister is the worse of the two—the old vixen. All high and mighty she was, back in King Gustav's time, turning up her nose at King Gustav's brother, and fair breaking his heart, the poor young man. And now she doesn't mind who she lives with, so be as there's money to hand."

She raised her voice, hoping that the other customers were listening.

"What the devil are you talking about, woman?" said the irritated General. "She lives with her brother at Blasieholm."

"Ay. Now that the other one's dead and left her his money. And maybe it's better not to ask how he came to die!"

"Will you be quiet? . . . Bring me some more coffee. And I don't want any more of your filthy newspapers." Skjöldebrand wiped the crumbs off his frock-coat, and stared the waitress out of the room.

He looked round at the other customers—a clerk in steel-rimmed spectacles, eating German sausage on his bread, a man who looked like a commercial traveller, a dock-labourer or long-shore sailor who drank coffee to unmusical accompaniment. General Skjöldebrand was not exactly of humble origin: his father had been consul-general at Algiers, and little Anders had grown up among the black faces of pirates and slave-dealers. But he had had a hard time when he had first come to Stockholm as a subaltern, and had often had to

breakfast at such places as these perforce. Now, to prevent himself growing too proud or secure, he occasionally breakfasted here for choice.

With the waitress away, and none of his neighbours watching him, he could not resist the temptation to take another glance at the offending article in the newspaper.

It was enough to make an honest soldier's blood boil, the way the papers lied nowadays and got folk to believe their lies. It almost made one regret King Gustav's days, when public opinion meant the opinion of the Court and a few great nobles, not the scurrilous vulgarities of Stockholm's backstreets and printing-houses. It was true that the said Court and nobles had, while preserving the decencies, made life duller and careers less promising (for all except their own circle) than they were now, in these freer, more bustling days. Skjöldebrands could hardly have become Generals, however deserving they had been, with so many aristocratic nincompoops to be put over them. But General Anders of that name was level-headed enough to see that all changes meant bad as well as good, and honest enough to hate some of the things that had crept in through the broken barriers of the past.

They were hateful enough, in all conscience; the newspaper article he was reading was the kind of thing to turn one's stomach. Line by line, word by word, the wretched scribbler had set himself to thrust evil meanings into the lightest acts and words of two fellow-creatures—one of whom at least, however proud and aristocratic, was spiritually on a level incomprehensible to those who wrote for newspapers. All the venom engendered by centuries of subjection to the rich, all the rancour of Present against Past, of growing power against decaying tradition, were concentrated into the double column of smudgy print. General Skjöldebrand snorted in disgust, threw the paper to the floor and decided not to wait for his second pot of coffee; he would walk out and find someone with whom to share his indignation. He slammed a coin on to the table and marched for the door. But before he could reach it the waitress had returned.

"What's the matter?" she said, wiping greasy hair out of her eyes.

General Skjöldebrand said nothing, but his hand waved vaguely towards the newspaper on the floor. He motioned her to pick it up, took it from her and began to tear it into little shreds.

"Here!" said the woman, "that's our newspaper! That belongs to the *café*!"

General Skjöldebrand continued his tearing. The expression on his face suggested that the *café* would be better without such dubious attractions.

"I know you think it's all lies," said the woman resentfully. "You gentry always stick by each other. But what we say is that there's no smoke without fire."

General Skjöldebrand's eyes flashed with a new indignation. Of all the infuriating things in the world, nothing made him more speechless than that unanswerable though fallacious proverb. But his silence was even proof against the new provocation. He pointed the woman aside and marched to the door.

"Maybe you're too high and mighty to know it," she said, "but we hear how they've carried on with each other, sleeping with Dukes and Queens and the like. I'm respectable, I am, and if someone was to kill the pair of them, I'd say they'd only got what they've deserved."

The door slammed in her face, and she turned back to the other customers for applause. She got it, if a little grudgingly.

"It isn't just a matter of sleeping with people," said the commercial traveller, who wanted to be fair, and remembered the pleasant night he had just passed in the suburbs. "There's worse things than that. A lot worse."

The sailor made the room echo with a long suck of coffee, wiped his lips and then said nothing.

"The Fersens have been working against us—against the People—for years," observed the clerk, with his mouth full of German sausage. "What we want in this country is a revolution, like they had in France—this Count Axel tried to stop it, they say! And we'll get it some say. There's some folk that'll never learn sense until there's a guillotine put up in the Kungs Trädgård!"

"Oh, don't start talking silly!" said the waitress, and flounced over to the sailor.

"Maybe it's not so silly," said the commercial traveller. "I was at Helsingborg last month."

The clerk was too well wound up to notice that other clocks were eager to strike. "A Revolution!" he repeated, his spectacles flashing as he spoke. "What have they ever done for us? They tax us to death and pay us wages a mouse couldn't live on. They've lost us the war, lost Finland to the foreigners. And all they do is to ride about in coaches and sneer!"

He paused a moment; perhaps he remembered that the master—or, as it happened, mistress—who decided his wages, was herself sneered at by noblemen in coaches, and that neither she nor they had anything to do with the loss of Finland. But revolutionaries cannot afford to be discriminating. 'They' must remain a vague symbol for all that has been singled out for hate.

"Prince August would have put them in their places," he said, "if only he had lived. He was always doing good turns to poor folk, here in Stockholm. I expect that was why he was sent off to . . . to . . . Did you say you had just come from Helsingborg?"

"I did," answered the traveller, as though coming into his own at last. "Only you were so keen on lecturing us you didn't seem to be interested."

"And you saw what happened?"

"I saw the Prince ride off in the morning, looking as fit as a fiddle . . . well, pretty fit. He was always a bit red in the face, you know. Wore his collar too tight. He was going to review the Mörnerska Regiment—the Hussars. And no sooner had he got to the Parade ground than down he drops from his horse, as dead as mutton. And folk in Helsingborg are saying . . ." His voice dropped to a whisper: he leant across to the clerk. The listening waitress could only hear the word "breakfast . . . something in his coffee".

"No need to whisper," she said defiantly. "It's in the family. Everyone knows that his sister lived with Baron Evert Taube for ten years and then poisoned him for his money. Why it's even in the newspapers! Look!" She dived under the table, hoping to reconstruct the Fable of the Foxes out of the scattered fragments that General Skjöldebrand had left. The

other two ignored her, except in speaking audibly again.

"And who do you think did the post-mortem?" asked the traveller. "You'll hardly believe it but the job was given to a foreigner—an Italian. What do you think of that? Of course he made pretence there was nothing wrong. Talked about apoplexy and so forth! The doctors from Malmö said afterwards that he'd bungled the whole business. It's my belief he was meant to bungle it. They didn't want him to give them away!"

"Wait a second!" said the clerk, swallowing his last mouthful of sausage whole. "What kind of foreigner did you say?"

"An Italian, they said in Helsingborg."

"Not a fellow called Rossi?"

"I believe that was the name."

"But . . . but . . . but Rossi! That's the name of the fellow who has been family physician to the Fersens since . . . the Lord knows how long. The old Count made him and the son has always had him under——"

"Didn't you know about the Doctor?" interrupted the girl, rising from the dirty floor. "Why everyone in Stockholm knew. Here, it's in this newspaper!"

She dangled the two long strips of print, waving in the draught from her hot kitchen.

The sailor rose from his table, towering over her unkempt head.

"Newspapers——!" he said, and added an indecency to express his opinion of them. "Guillotines and revolutions——!" he went on, and found something blasphemous to cover a world of contempt. "That's all talk, fit for the likes of you. But when me and my mates gets the tip from you gentlemen that something's amiss, and very much amiss, we don't sit talking about it. We *does* something!"

He spat on his hands, grasped the knob of the door, and clumped out of the dark coffee-house into the dazzling street.

GENERAL SKJÖLDEBRAND, pacing down the street, was long ago out of earshot of *café* politics. The sun was already hot and wonderfully cheering. The streets were empty

enough, for half the town had gone to line the route for the procession that was to bring Prince August to his lying-in-state. But there were bright flowers in the window-boxes, and a few children kicked cheerfully in the gutter. The General's indignation simmered down a little; he began to feel again that the world, taking it by and large, could be a jolly enough place. His unreasonably quick walk slowed down to a reasonable saunter. Newspaper-writers needed a thrashing occasionally, but maybe they did less harm than one imagined. He would walk down and see the procession.

He turned a corner, meeting the sun's full force. He stood enjoying its warmth, enjoying, through blinking eyes, the prospect of Stockholm's roofs and spires. 'A citizen of no mean city'—General Skjöldebrand knew his Bible and liked to recall its phrases. Stockholm was a great city as well as a beautiful one. Few towns in Europe had seen so many great men live or die to make her famous. Her glory was in eclipse for the moment, but only for the moment: Sweden was still smarting under defeat in battle and the loss of a province she had possessed for centuries. Sweden would rise again and Stockholm recover her just pride. Meanwhile she would do nothing to sully the honour of her amazing past.

He began to walk slowly southward. As he took the first steps, one of the children behind him let out a sudden howl.

"What are you doing," she shrieked at her brother, "throwing stones at me?"

"I was only practising," said the unrepentant boy. "Father says there's going to be a riot in town to-day, and I thought I'd be one of the rioters."

THE OLD GENTLEMAN IN BLACK WAS DRIVING out from Blasieholm in the coach that had been his father's coach.

It was drawn by six white horses, trotting with stately paces: their harness was of red morocco, with studs of gilded bronze. Beside it ran six footmen, in their livery of white and scarlet, with many-coloured ribbons dangling from knee and shoulder. It was so that his father had driven through Stockholm streets. It was so that he too must drive, in these days when few remembered that life was the poorer without splendour and ceremony. He himself sat upright, in his simple mourning, staring straight before him with set and expressionless face.

The streets seemed empty round Blasieholm; there was only one small knot of loiterers at the corner of the Kungsträdgård. They scowled at the coach, at the beribboned lacqueys, at the old dummy in black, sitting so upright and waxen behind glass windows. The coachman on the box noticed those scowls, though not a flicker of his eyelid betrayed his concern. He had been reprimanded once that morning for officious anxiety. His duty was discharged, and there was nothing more he could do, except keep his eyes fixed upon his gravely pacing team. He could not help wishing that his master had listened to his warning, to the second and more urgent message which reached the house as they were about to take their departure. But great folk were great folk, and a servant could not turn them from their obstinacies.

They were past the King's garden, the green trees emerald in the dancing sun. They were trotting into the shadow of the Royal Theatre, where once the Opera House had stood. Young Gustav Adolf had had the Opera House pulled down, perhaps because a villain had once fired a pistol there, perhaps for some reason no one could divine. That young man had done so many things for which there seemed no reason.

They turned over the bridge, drove as if driving to the Palace.

The old gentleman was as rigid as ever, as inscrutable of face. He grasped his State-Marshal's staff with unfidgeting fingers. He had never been one to take heed of warnings. In younger days, when life was sweet, he had risked it again and again, ignoring the advice of more prudent men. It was strange that they were for the most part dead, while he, to whom life meant nothing now, had survived a hundred rashnesses. But the world was a strange place, defeating speculation and contradicting every theory whereby man hoped to explain its mysteries. In the end there was nothing one could do, except fulfil one's duty. It was good to have duties, even trivial duties, to fill the emptiness of life. It was good to fulfil them punctiliously, in spite of warnings, attending the State funeral of a man who had meant nothing, a man towards whom one had felt neither ill nor well. But, unreasonable as life itself, the old gentleman could not help hoping (in case there were some grain of truth in repeated messages) that his sister and his intending bride had found a way to leave an ungrateful and possibly riotous city.

They passed beneath the Palace. They had traversed the route along which King Gustav had been borne, in torchlit masquerade, to the threshold he would never cross again. It was no good thinking of King Gustav; he had lived his life so variously and so ambiguously that thought was baffled. The judgment on it was not one that Man could give. Circumstance had passed one strange judgment, moulding from the wreckage the fate of his son and successor. That same palace they were now passing had seen Gustav IV, after countless follies, carried kicking and struggling out, like the obstinate child he was, by a couple of exasperated generals. Soldiers have little patience with would-be heroes, would-be rivals of Napoleon, who cannot win the smallest skirmish. Nor had Sweden regretted the undignified exit of a King for whose actions there never seemed to be any good reason, a King who had lost them Finland and made them the laughing-stock of Europe.

The Palace was silent and deserted now. Duke Carl, King

Carl XIII, was in residence at Haga. He had decided not to follow the procession from the Horn Gate to the church on the Riddarholm, bearing the dead body of the good-natured, negligible little Dane whom he had hoped to make his heir. He had sent troops to line the road, though no one could guess what orders he had given them. He had left State-Marshal Hans Axel von Fersen to drive along it in almost kingly state, exciting the envy of a discontented Stockholm. Among the many messages that had reached Blasieholm, there was one more ominous than most. It was whispered that someone had told King Carl that his State-Marshal had grown unaccountably unpopular in Stockholm and might meet with considerable unpleasantness in the streets: and it was whispered that King Carl had replied: "It will do that conceited old aristocrat no harm to have a lesson from the People."

There were more of the People along the Skeppsbro—little knots on the curving quay, a crowd under the shadow of the waterside houses. They too scowled, to left and right of the coach: a few spat and shouted. The State-Marshal did not turn his head or relax his stiffness. Only once he raised his right hand to his left, and twisted the ring he wore.

There were stories about the ring, stories told with bated breath in the taverns where sailors meet and superstitions flourish. It was supernatural, a thing of magic and sorcery. It had been given him by a witch of France, long since dead. Its wearer bore a charmed life, and no one could kill him until the ring was wrenched or hacked from his finger. So whispered Rumour, amid tobacco smoke and the fumes of cheap brandy, by the bars of waterside taverns.

Fersen fingered the ring quite mechanically. He was thinking of other things, of the emptiness of his life, of the longing for something unusual, supernatural even, to fill that emptiness. He remembered the few minutes he had spent, nearly fifteen years ago, talking in mutual embarrassment to Berthier in the castle of Rastadt. He remembered Berthier's stolid face as he said: "So you've been the luckiest one, after all". To the Berthiers of this world, Money and Leisure, honours and an empty life were all labelled as 'luck'. Berthier might have money now, and a dozen new-fangled titles from

the new-fangled Empire which had supplanted the Republic; but he had none of the leisure he envied others and could not have endured himself. He was slave to more pressing and more multiplex duties, helping his master—no longer haggard, but sleek, full-cheeked and triumphant—to drench Europe, each year, with increasing tides of blood. An end would come to that one day, perhaps soon; Berthier was probably poring already over a map of Russia, muttering names stranger than ever, and spanning with his compasses that vast plain that had defeated Carl XII and might yet defeat Napoleon. But that defeat might mean an end to everything, to such little civilisation as still survived amid the marching armies, the famines and prison camps, the millions who cowered beneath the rule of their self-styled Liberator. With his fall all would fall, and chaos come again. Meanwhile, one could do nothing except watch in patience, and bear witness that Life had once been sweet.

They were over the swing-bridge now: they had left the Palace island, the heart of Stockholm. They had cut into the route along which they must return in procession. Before them stretched the Horns Gata, leading to the gate where Prince August waited in his hearse; there would be soldiers there, the same Mörnerska Hussars among whom he had died at Helsingborg, with whom he had made this last journey to the capital where he would never be a King. The Horns Gata was long and straight. Each pavement was crowded, at every window faces showed. Even the rigid old man in the coach, dreaming of a vanished past, could not but feel the menace of their massed hostility. If there was only one to shout "Poisoner!" at the gilded coach, there were a hundred, a thousand, to think it as he passed.

They had reached the end of the street, the old gateway which still led out into open country—though mushroom villas were already burgeoning. The hearse was waiting, the two half squadrons of Mörnerska Hussars: their gold facings and furbished accoutrements glittered cheerfully in the morning sun.

The coachman wheeled his six horses to the left, circled them round the little square beneath the Toll-gate and then drew

rein. All had been carefully thought out. A half squadron of hussars trotted forward and dropped into the solemn walk which must mark the funereal occasion. Behind them a party of staff officers and *aides-de-camp* fell into formation. As they gained the opening of the Horns Gata, State-Marshal Fersen's coachman followed in their rear. Behind him came the hearse, the Court Chamberlain's coach, the second half squadron, and the travelling carriages of the dead Prince's suite. So they passed back into that long straight lane of silence, of watching resentment and hatred.

They were near Saint Mary's Church, three quarters of the way to the swing bridge, when the first stone was thrown.

GENERAL ANDERS SKJÖLDEBRAND, red-faced but dapper in his black frock-coat, was watching the cavalcade from behind the ranks of soldiers in Södermalms Square. He did not like the look of the crowd, nor the sound of savage mutterings that seemed to fill the air. If it had not been for the troops, there might be more stones flying here. As it was, the procession emerged from the Horns Gata unhampered, but Skjöldebrand could not help noticing that one of the coach windows was already cracked. He wished Fersen had not thought so much display was called for, he wished that the gilded coach had toned in better with the drab-hued, dusty hearse. State-Marshal Fersen, preceding it with such splendour and circumstance, might suggest, to envious eyes, the triumph of a victor who brings a murdered enemy in his wake. But the envious did nothing to hinder the procession in the Södermalms Square: it reached the head of the swing bridge in safety: General Skjöldebrand turned away, elbowed himself out of the crowd and sought some side-street that would take him on to the island without need of further elbowing.

He had a notion that he ought to go to the Palace, find Klingsporr, the Governor of Stockholm, and warn him that Stockholm was in ugly mood. Klingsporr was a soldier of sorts, but the good General could not help wishing, as he went to find him, that he was not such an unmitigated old woman. What-

ever happened, Klingsporr was certain to lose his head at the first hint of danger.

THERE WAS ALREADY MORE THAN a hint. There had been delay at the swing bridge, confusion and opposition in the open Kornhamn beyond. The old gentleman sat unmoved in his now stationary coach, grasping his Marshal's staff. It was for the hussars and the *aides-de-camp* to make a way through opposition.

His left hand had begun to twist the ring again, the magic ring that had perhaps kept him alive for a score of years while men died by millions in every corner of a distracted Europe. It was not quite a score. It was exactly nineteen years ago, in the dawn twilight of this twentieth of June, that his heart's love had leant out of her coach window and slipped the ring over the finger of his right hand. Then she had driven away, to Safety as he hoped, but, as it proved, to Ruin. It was too late to blame her or himself for that ruin, too late to blame anyone for anything. He was old, and knew that no one could hope to defeat the unreasonableness of Life. One could only defy it, endure its monotonies and melancholies, face the dangers that might at least put an end to monotony.

The coach jolted forward. The hussars had quelled opposition. The cavalcade entered Stor Nygata—Great New Street—one of Stockholm's oldest and narrowest thoroughfares. If all were well, if Klingsporr had made proper arrangements, if the troops were stationed with reasonable forethought, the procession should reach the House of Peers in ten minutes at most, the Riddarholm Church within a quarter of an hour.

But all was far from well.

GENERAL SKJÖLDEBRAND HAD NOT gone to the Palace after all. He had crossed over to the island, threaded his way through little dusty markets and down the evil-

smelling alleys that led tortuously to the sun-flecked water. But the noise on his left was growing, insistent and dangerous. He stopped to listen, and did not like what he heard. He questioned the few people that hurried through the half-deserted streets and peered at him from shaded doorways. They could not or would not answer. Only an old woman, selling apples at the corner, mumbled that they'd never get through; that there was going to be no end of a fox-hunt in Great New Street; that she'd seen 'em last night, carrying paving-stones up on to the roofs; inches thick they were, enough to smash a man to pieces, even through a coach-top, falling that height from the roofs. "Soldiers?" she said in answer to the General's interruption. "There's no soldiers this side of the Parliament House. They've put no soldiers in that street there."

Skjöldebrand turned left and walked more quickly, ran almost, as the uproar ahead grew more alarming. If there were no troops lining the Stor Nygata, surely Fersen could have called out to the *aides-de-camp*, demanded the half squadron of hussars to ride beside his coach instead of beribboned flunkies. Mobs were afraid of cavalry, afraid of flashing swords. It was easy to cut one's way through, if only with the flat of the blade, leaving no wounds, no bothersome Enquiries and recriminations. Then he remembered those paving-stones, and broke into a run. In a few minutes he had forced his way through the overflow of the crowd in the side-streets and emerged panting into the Stor Nygata.

It was blocked with chattering, muttering, gesticulating humanity. There was no pathway down the middle of it, no avenue for a procession. Far ahead, like a tufted island in the stream, the half-squadron of Mörnerska Hussars sat idly on their fidgeting steeds. The other half-squadron, the hearse and the carriages that had followed it, seemed scuttled at the river-mouth and had hardly made their way into the long, narrow street. The State-Marshal's coach, wrecked beyond recognition, its roof gaping and its sides in splinters, stood forlornly beneath the shadows of the Huguenot Church, where the surge of men seemed thickest. Of State-Marshal Fersen himself, Skjöldebrand could see no sign.

He soon guessed his whereabouts. The most tumultuous group of gesticulators were gathered round the steps of the house next the Church. From its windows came shouts and thumpings and the whinnying of cruel laughter. In the street beneath, an officer sat his horse, pale at the gills, arguing feebly with the mob that pressed about his knees. Skjöldebrand recognised Adjutant-General Silversparre, and was not surprised at the feebleness. "Oh, you're right, my friends, quite right," he heard him say, "but you must just be good-natured about it." As he spoke, another window flew open, a pair of shoes came hurtling into the street. It was followed by a coat, a black satin coat, already in tatters, and by another burst of that hateful laughter.

Skjöldebrand, looking round him in desperation, suddenly caught the tramp of marching feet. He ran to a doorstep, climbed it, and peered over the heads of the crowd. A detachment of artillerymen was coming down the street, scattering obstruction as they came. They forced their way to within two hundred yards of the house where Fersen was being baited, mishandled, perhaps even murdered, and then suddenly, incredibly, they halted and stood fast. Skjöldebrand saw who their officer was: he knew Major Geete by sight: he battled his way towards him, and was beside him in a couple of minutes. "For God's sake," he said, "why halt here? Halt outside the house if you like, and give these scoundrels a fright."

Major Geete looked down his nose. "Orders from Adjutant-General Silversparre," he said. "Orders to halt here."

"Then get 'em cancelled! Send one of your men. The Adjutant-General's there, just down there!"

Geete called out a gunner, gave him a reluctant order. But before the man could make his way through the press, with Skjöldebrand in his wake, Silversparre had thrown a leg over his horse, swung to the ground and vanished into the house.

The crowd was thickening every minute, its gestures grew more menacing. Something must be done, and quickly; someone must be found who was not wondering how to put responsibility on to the shoulders of others. Skjöldebrand darted through the crowd, making for side-streets, for the

Palace if necessary, in hope to find an officer of sufficient standing to take matters in hand.

He found many, but none with resolution: a mob is a terrifying thing. He found the Governor Klingsporr, whom he had first gone to seek, hobbling down a side-street from the Palace on the arm of a lacquey. The Governor had gout: the Governor was a foolish old woman who had completely lost his head: the Governor was making his lame way to a cellar where hatches could be battened down over his trembling head. General Vegesack was glum and unhelpful. General Anercreutz dashed hither and thither on a bewildered horse, trying to talk to the people in as feeble a vein as Silversparre, instead of leading the Hussars to ride the mob down, instead of ordering the Guards at the Parliament House to charge the street, to fire a volley of blank cartridge, to fire ball if need be. Seething with indignation, Skjöldebrand began to fight his way back to the house where Fersen had taken refuge. As he approached it, Adjutant-General Silversparre appeared on the threshold. On his arm leant a frail old man in a torn and blood-stained shirt, shoeless, with haggard, haunted eyes.

There was a howl as soon as he was seen. They shouted: "Old Fox! Poisoner! Aristocrat!" Someone was yelling something unintelligible about Doctor Rossi. They could hardly be called mob. They were for the most part clerks, petty merchants, shopkeepers. When the blows began to rain, it was umbrellas that whirled and crashed. Even umbrellas, properly handled, can draw blood. Fersen's head, Silversparre's beside it, were soon streaming red. Silversparre was making noble amends for his former feebleness. The two old men fought their way desperately forward, their grey hair streaked with scarlet. They reached the spot where General Vegesack sat idly on his horse, and Fersen clung to his stirrup-leather, panting for the protection of the General's sabre. But Vegesack was a foreigner, a Mecklenburg German. He was not a man to side with the weaker party against such brutal odds. Skjöldebrand, good Swede and generous soldier, saw the sabre raised indeed, but not to save or rescue: he could hardly believe his ears when he heard Vegesack shouting wildly that he would strike unless the old fool let go.

The old fool let go. He was parted from Silversparre now, but he struggled to the shelter of the waiting gunners. He ran between their lines, with the hunters halloing in his wake. He slipped out beyond them, dashed on until the House of Peers loomed above him, and he was among the waiting Regiment of Guards. Someone caught him by the elbow, dragged him through the midst of them into momentary safety. A minute later, he found himself hustled into the guard-room of the Parliament, heard the heavy door clang to behind him and its key turn in the lock. He looked round at the barred windows, the solid whitewashed walls. He was wounded, but not mortally. There was a great jug of water on the table, standing amid fragments of bread and broken clay pipes. He tottered towards it, leant forward in exhaustion, and drank and drank and drank.

THEY HAD REACHED BLASIEHOLM. They were swarming round the Palace of the past, the treasure-house of Tradition and Elegance and Extravagance, the home of all they most loathed or envied. They came tumbling over the garden-wall, howling along the terrace where a little girl had once played with her grey-eyed brother. They shattered the windows, burst into the stately rooms. So had French mobs burst into the Tuileries, French peasants tumbled into the gardens of their landlords' *châteaux*. Stockholm was having her one-day Revolution, her mean and brutal parody of what had been brutal but heroic. Here were no Switzers to die for their master, no aristocrats even, with their deadly needle-like swords. It was a woman they hunted, an old woman, protected at best by servants whom they hoped to seduce from duty. "Join us," they shouted, "and you'll soon have servants of your own!" But they sought in vain for the mistress, the wanton, as they called her, who had poisoned her lover and flaunted his wealth in their faces. Only a fresh heap of gravel on the terrace (had they stopped to notice it) might have told them where she had buried his letters, her own manifold correspondence with the wealthy, the refined, the upholders of Tradition. The hunters raged murderously through the

rooms, tearing the be-ruffed and breast-plated Fersens from their gilded frames. But the old vixen had left her earth and they raged and tore in vain.

It was the milkmaid who had warned her, had attempted to warn her brother. As he smiled his proud smile and stepped into the waiting coach, she had redoubled her warnings to the women who were not blinded by pride. Emily must go home: a few yards would put her in safety: no one in Stockholm, certainly no one outside her little circle of elegance, knew of her strange passion for the poor old man who was now slaking his thirst from a guard-room pitcher, and sinking wounded back against the whitewashed wall.

It had been the Lady Sophie, the milkwoman had insisted, who was in deadly danger. The Lady Sophie must leave Stockholm at once, by any means that could be devised. There were watchers in the streets, men who scowled at Blasieholm from neighbouring street-corners. The sailors on the quays might well be in the plot. The Lady Sophie, once she had buried those papers she seemed to set such store by, had better change clothes with the milk-woman, escape to a boat, in humble masquerade.

She did as she was bid. She fitted disguised through the garden-gate, reached the waterside without mishap. She had brought money and could hire herself convoy. She had friends lords and ladies with gardens that ran down to the shore, ten, twenty, fifty miles from the suddenly maddened city. She had to sail more than fifty: too many lords and ladies had heard of the sudden madness and made this excuse or that for refusing foothold to the hunted fugitive. Mobs can travel. It was early morning when she found a true friend, and the brightness of yesterday had given place to storm and wind and rain. But she reached safety at last, was grateful for comforting walls and warmth and a dry bed. She could lie there wondering at her escape—wondering what had happened to her brother.

THEY HAD NOT LEFT HIM long in peace. They had howled and threatened outside the barred windows, walked

tauntingly up and down before the strangely silent ranks of the soldiers in the Parliament Square. Before they ventured further, they must know what message might have come from the King at Haga, what orders had been issued to the Royal Guard.

No message had come from Haga; there had hardly been time for any. And, though a century and a half has passed since that shameful day in the annals of Sweden, no annalist has yet been able to discover what orders were issued to the Guard, or why they stood silent while the Grand Marshal of Sweden was done to death beneath the House of Peers.

For barred windows could not hold out the mob, nor the lock of a guard-room door. Risking blank cartridge and ball, they hurled themselves against his refuge, broke down every barrier, and hauled their victim out into the sunlight. They were tearing his clothes from him till he stood half-naked, they were wrenching out the grey hairs of his once venerable head. Lest they should still fear magic, a sailor rushed in, hacking at his finger with a knife, twisting away the ring that might keep him from their hatred. His hours of agony were closing now. He had begun to see his home through the mist of blood that welled across his eyes. In the midst of the thunder that throbbed and bruised his brain, he heard strange voices, the boyish laughter of a sister, the whisperings of a Queen. And then, clear and high, a voice unsteady with wine, above the grinning statues, the moonlit waters of a pond. "Do you know Greek?" it said, fantastically inapt. "A pastor once told me that the Greek word for 'witness' was the same as the word for 'martyr'."

They had him down. They were kicking and beating at him. A sailor with heavy sea-boots was trampling and jumping on his body. They fell back for a moment, since they had done all that was needed. They saw his lips move, hushed each other's screeching to listen. They waited to catch the dying words of the proud oppressor, the parasite of Kings, the poisoner of the Nation's darling. Let him call on his Kings now, if their ghosts could prevail against the just wrath of an avenging People. They strained their ears towards their prostrate victim, for his breath came short and feeble.

"Christ, take me to You," he whispered to the King of Kings. "Christ, forgive them by whose deed I come."

POSTSCRIPT

Of the characters in this book, all who are mentioned *by name* (and a few others, whose names I have been unable to trace) represent actual historical persons.

Of these, a very high proportion left written record of themselves—and of each other—in numerous letters, in diaries kept up from day to day, or in memoirs composed after the event. All were described and discussed, praised or reviled, by hundreds of their contemporaries whose diaries, letters, memoirs, Law-Court and other official records, form a mass of first-hand evidence that could not be mastered by a lifetime of study.

I have not been able to spend more than three years, and during the third of these I have been serving as a soldier in the ranks—a position which makes historical research exceedingly difficult: I owe a debt of gratitude to certain officers of His Majesty's Forces through whose considerateness I have been able to carry on at all.

I have tried—with a few inevitable exceptions noted below—to keep close to the main facts of the story and even to small details of time and place. I have seldom described faces without studying at least one portrait, nor attributed opinions to men or women without having read their own writings or speeches on the subject in question. I am not so foolish as to imagine that I have avoided errors and inaccuracies, perhaps serious ones. I can only assure the reader that I have spared no pains to reduce them to a minimum.

I owe a private debt to Mr. A. S. W. Odelberg, of Djursholm, Sweden, for his untiring generosity and eagerness in supplying me with materials for research. My public debts are innumerable. I owe much to the minuteness of M. Le Notre's scholarship and to his unparalleled power of forging tiny details of time and place into weapons that can pierce the heart. I owe something to the now despised Carlyle, and a little to the fashionable Herr Zweig: I have taken a few hints

from Strindberg's tantalising play *Gustav III*, and many judgments from Mr. Nisbet Bain's unjustly neglected biography.

One debt is so obvious as hardly to need mention. Mr. Hilaire Belloc must now be accustomed to seeing his historical discoveries and literary methods plagiarised by those who yet follow the fashion of sneering at his few limitations and undisguised prejudices. I hope I have avoided actual plagiarism. I take credit, for instance, for having resisted the temptation to steal his somewhat unsympathetic *mot juste* for Gustav—'fibbertigibbet'. But the underlying debt is enormous, and I hope Mr. Belloc will accept an acknowledgment from one who persists in regarding him as the most vivid interpreter of the past, and the greatest master of prose style that England has produced for at least a generation.

Historical debts being discharged, I must endeavour to acknowledge the novelist's inevitable lapses from historical accuracy.

I. New World. It is here implied that the surrender of Yorktown and the birth of the Dauphin occurred at the same hour. Actually the first happened at about 10 o'clock on the morning of Friday, the nineteenth of October, the latter at 11 o'clock on the following Monday morning.

II. Old World. The sculptor Sergel did not join King Gustav's travelling party at Florence, but later at Rome. For other details of the visit to the dowdy Palazzo, readers who can tackle Swedish are referred to Adlerbeth's detailed diary, in letter-form.

It is unlikely that Mirabeau would visit Necker's home in the manner suggested. But the two were coming to loggerheads about this time, and for the reasons given.

Unless the Diamond Necklace sharpers were conducting some kind of dress-rehearsal, King Gustav would not have seen the Queen's 'Double' in Versailles Park. The hideous little trick was actually played on De Rohan on July 24th, five days after his departure for Sweden.

It is just possible, but highly improbable, that the Queen was at the masquerade where Pejron challenged La Marck.

She had once been in the habit of attending such affairs (arriving once, to general scandal, in a cab), but she had broken herself of this before 1784.

III. Shadows. I can find no date for Ribbing's duel with Essen, but fancy I have antedated it considerably. Essen did not marry Charlotta De Geer until 1788.

The whole story of Emily De Geer, as given here and in the Epilogue, is taken from an otherwise reliable book, *Le Comte Axel von Fersen*, by F. De Gélis. My attempts to find better historical warrant were defeated by the war and the interruption of communications with Sweden.

IV. False Dawn. I know nothing of 'Pen Ququa' except his name, nationality, and residence in Göteborg: even 'P'ing Kai' is a guess at the Chinese original of a rather baffling concoction.

Fersen was not sent to the town until after Gustav had arrived there on his amazing ride. But the details of that ride, and of Governor Durietz's behaviour (including the furniture-removal), are all historical.

The long speech of Gustav is very freely paraphrased from one he delivered to the assembled Houses on February 17th, 1789. The original is recognised as one of the supreme masterpieces of Swedish prose. Literally translated into English, much of it falls rather flat, owing to the differences of the two languages. It seems to me that an attempt at eloquence, however free, is a juster reproduction than a close but more pedestrian translation.

V. Deluge. I have probably exaggerated the part played by Fersen in the events of 1789-90. He was certainly present at the looting of the Hôtel de Ville on October 5th. He certainly rode to Versailles to warn the Queen, and his curious repetition of her word 'répit' is vouched for in Madame D'Adhémar's memoirs. (In choosing my *locale* for the interview and describing Marie-Antoinette's dress, I have fallen under the influence of that queer book, *An Adventure*, by Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain: these ladies had a very strange

experience at Trianon, but historians would hardly regard it as trustworthy evidence.) Fersen was also in one of the coaches that returned next day to Paris, and was probably in disguise as one of the mob. But he did not meet Gouverneur Morris till a few weeks later. Nothing is known of his personal relations with Mirabeau, and it is not likely that he was at the side-gate at St. Cloud on the momentous morning of July 4th, 1790. But Mirabeau's opinions on passports and some of his remarks on the death of Frederick of Prussia are historical, and the italicised quotation is from his letter to Talleyrand, written from Berlin at the time, and repeated in his *De la Monarchie Prussienne*.

Gouverneur Morris's interview with Madame Chastellux in her bathroom is historical, but misdated: it took place after the meeting of the States-General.

VI. The Fly-by-Nights. When Gustav arrived at Aachen, De Bouillé was too busy at Malmédy, and Fersen in Paris, to pay him a visit. The substance of their interview is telescoped from their secret, three-cornered correspondence, stretching over several months.

VII. O Mon Roi. The incident of Horn and Anckarström spying outside Gustav's window is correctly dated. But Ribbing did not meet Anckarström until a fortnight or so later, when he was introduced to him at Horn's country house of Hufvudstad.

There is contemporary evidence for the story of Bjelke's watch and snuff-box, but it is of dubious value. It is not likely that he was at the Opera House on the night of March 16th.

Count Fredrik Fersen did not call upon the dying King: as far as I can discover, he was not in Stockholm at the time: but the interview with him is transposed, with as few changes as possible, from Gustav's famous conversation with Brahe, Count Fredrik's friend and political ally. Indeed all King Gustav's speeches in this section are historical—and as literally translated as the idiom of this book will allow. There are some things with which (even though they happened a

hundred and fifty years ago) no novelist has any right to tamper.

VIII. O Ma Reine. It is unlikely that Curtius was among the volunteers who defended the Tuileries, or that his niece came there until next day—when she arrived to seek the dead bodies of her two brothers and three cousins in the Swiss Guard.

Napoleon's presence and opinions about the attack are, of course, historical.

The quotations from Fersen's letter and diary are closely translated from the originals.

The reader will find details of Drouet's later career and parachute descent in M. Le Notre's *Fuite à Varennes*. The latter part of the section is based on certain personal experiences, and on a proclamation discovered in a second-hand bookshop in a small Norman town some twenty years ago.

I regard the evidence for Father Magnin's entry into the Queen's prison (and his celebration of Mass there) as decidedly stronger than the objections urged against it. The Restoration of 1815 tempted everyone to lie and sentimentalise over the martyrs of the Revolution, but I have done my best to avoid including these lies in my narrative.

All the quotations from letters, poems and wills are authentic, and all the details about the actors and ex-actors correct. Though much romance has accumulated round Labussière's rescue of Fouquier's victims by destroying their papers in the judicial Bureau, the core of fact seems unshakable. He saved, among others, Josephine Beauharnais, and died enjoying a pension from the Empress Josephine.

The Conqueror. The principal inaccuracy is that Berthier was not at Rastadt during the Congress: he had been left behind to hold down Napoleon's conquests in Italy; he therefore received the instructions I quote (about plundering Venice of its statues, and taking 'rigorous measures') by post from Rastadt or Paris. But the temptation to re-unite for a moment two veterans of Yorktown was irresistible.

The Witness. No novelist could presume to invent anything

more dramatic or impressive than the plain fact. I have, for the most part, followed the excellent and detailed account given in Skjöldebrand's *Memoarer*. I have not been able to trace down the contemporary evidence for Fersen's last words. They are given in Schinkel-Bergman's *Souvenir de l'Histoire de la Suède*, Vol. V, p. 241.

There is one more matter to be discussed, the matter of Prejudice. It must be obvious that I am a believer in Hereditary Monarchy, with all its faults. Its mishandling during the period I have been describing seems to me less disastrous than the mishandling of Parliamentary Oligarchy in our own times. I believe that many of the evils of modern Europe are due to the destruction or squeezing-out of Hereditary Monarchy from all but nominal power. I believe that the American counterpart of our oligarchy is controlled in a most salutary way by the very strong principle of Monarchy (constitutional though not hereditary) embedded in the very wide powers of the President. But even without the safeguard, I prefer Parliamentary government to the illegitimate and degenerate Cæsarism that we are now fighting.

Meanwhile I am a novelist writing about men and women who believed Hereditary Monarchy to be an essential prop of civilisation, who (had they lived into our times) would have seen little to contradict, and much to set the seal on their belief. Dwelling (of necessity) on their opinions and instincts, selecting such facts as most justified them and viewing those facts through their eyes, I have no doubt produced a general impression which is gravely unjust to their opponents. I hope that my more intelligent readers will be able to pick out the rare passages where I have been able to show that I am not entirely unconscious of the inspiration of Revolution.

Less apology is perhaps needed for my dealings with the history of a certain nation, now at war with England. I can claim to have been careful of my facts, particularly my facts on the subject of the founder of the Prussian tradition of unscrupulousness. I can claim to have avoided a number of temptations—rejecting, for instance, the insufficient evidence that Gustav's murder was largely due to a filthy intrigue

organised from Berlin. Beyond that, I must leave my story to the judgment of the reader. I cannot pretend that I have the superhuman faculty of being fair-minded towards the nation through whose action my home is now in danger, and my countrymen, my friends abroad, and their women and children, are dying in thousands as I write. I can only hope that the resultant unfairness is not too serious a breach of my scholarship as a historian or my duty as a Christian.

EVAN JOHN

(L. Bdr. E. J. Simpson).

June, 1940.



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PORTRAIT GALLERY



HANS AXEL VON FERSEN



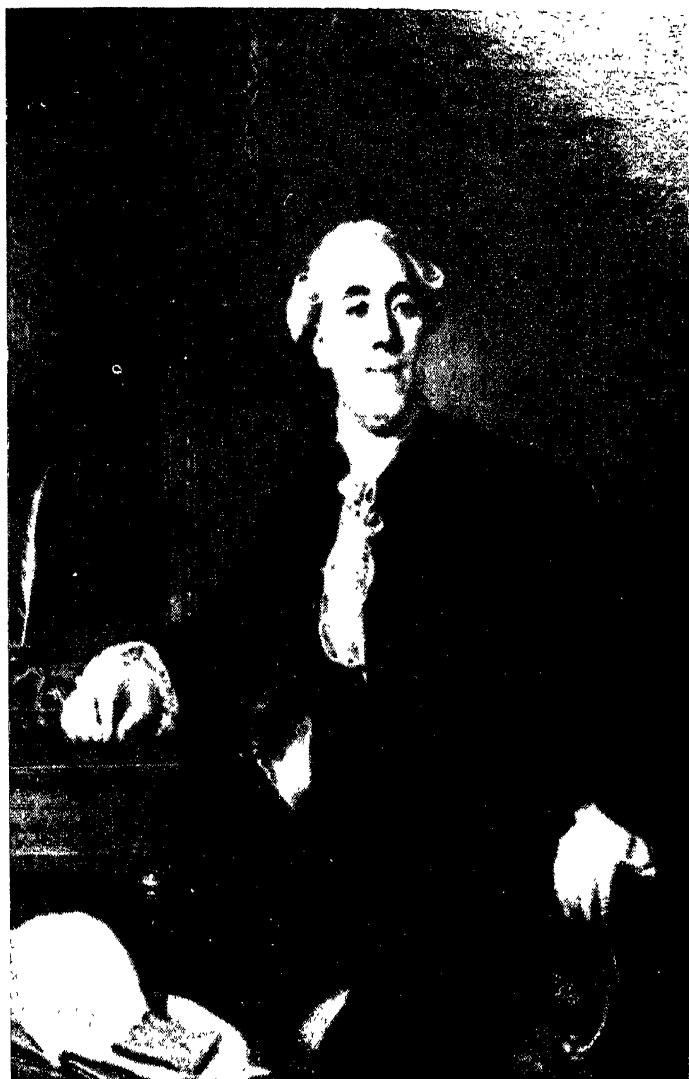
QUEEN MARIE-ANTOINETTE



KING LOUIS XVI



GUSTAV MAURITZ ARMFELT



JACQUES NECKER



MIRABEAU



CHARLES PHILIPPE COMTE D'ARTOIS



CAPTAIN JAKOB ANCKARSTRÖM